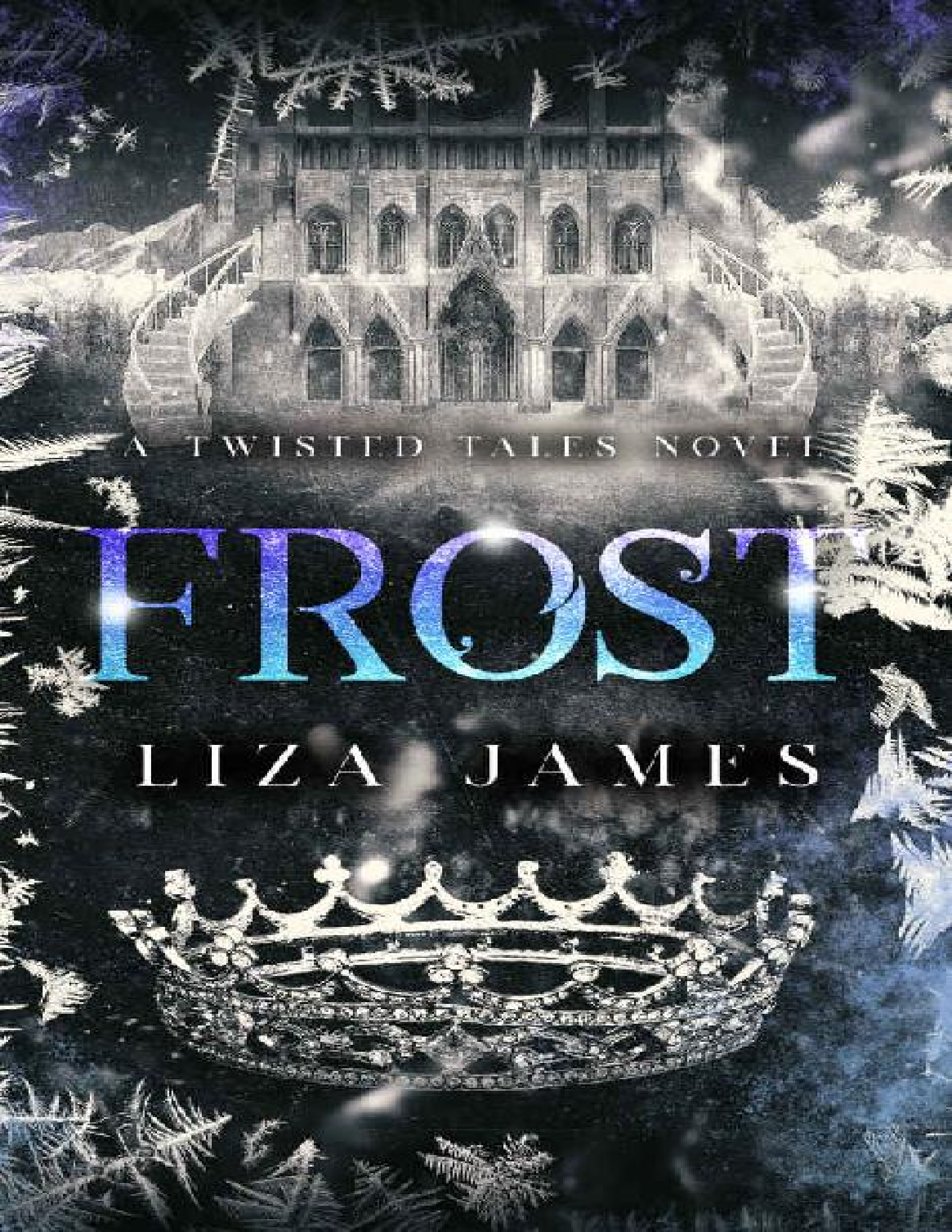




A TWISTED TALES NOVEL

FROST

LIZA JAMES



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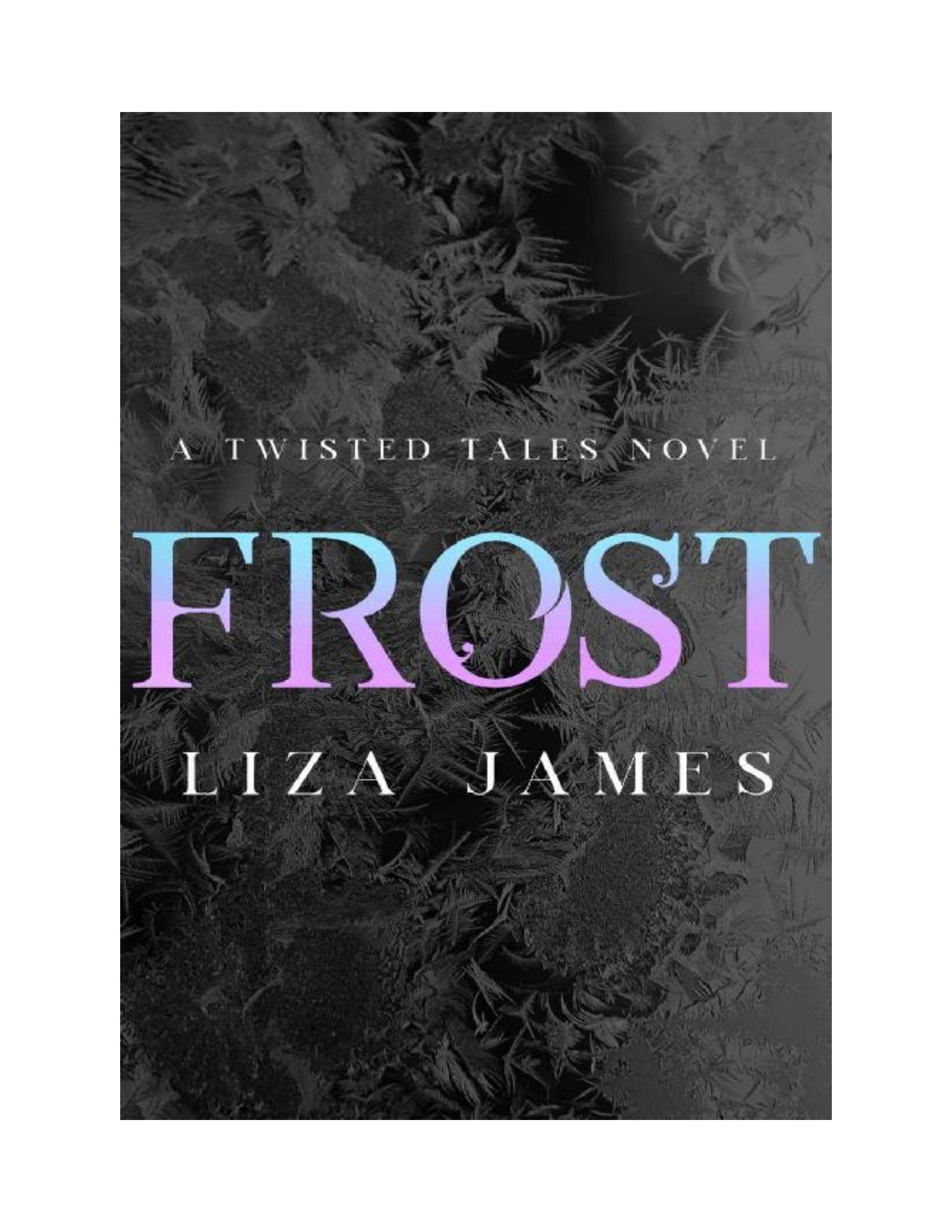
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A TWISTED TALES NOVEL

FROST

LIZA JAMES

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TRIGGER WARNING

This story is inspired by the fairy tale known as The Snow Queen.

While this isn't the darkest story I've ever written. It does carry darker themes and kinks that may seem taboo to some readers. Please be aware that sexual encounters are written in explicit detail.

BLURB

I've found myself trading one monster for another.

Lost to the dangerous touch of my captor and a slave to her commands.

Escape is my only option, but it seems she has other plans to break my defiant nature.

Pain. Punishment. Humiliation.

Fear of death—in one form or another—rules both my surrender and fight in this place. Afraid to give in and terrified to fight back.

But when lines become blurred and pain turns into pleasure, I find myself in an impossible position.

Kill to evade the Bite. Or give everything to the one who has stolen me from my own life.

*To every soul striving to write their own story and define
their own identity.*

This is for us.

CHAPTER ONE

Skilla

Silence.

That's all I want these days. Peace. Calm. Serenity.

Safety. Security.

A space I can no longer feel what I've felt for the last three years of my pathetic fucking life.

God, I must be a joke to all of them. The one who can't stop pining over the girls she inevitably falls for. The ones who never want me...and yet I continue offering whatever I believe they may take.

Stupid fucking whore.

The words repeat themselves like an incessant little gnat, flying far too closely again and again until you're desperate to kill it.

Kill it.

Die.

Stupid fucking whore.

My eyes graze over the stage, watching one of the dancers move against the pole until she drops down on all fours and arches her back for the audience. Dollars are thrown her way as she saunters toward them, making confident and powerful eye contact with each onlooker.

Her ass sways with every seductive inch she moves forward, her tits glistening with whatever shimmer she adorned her skin with behind stage, and now the sweat from her dance speckles her flesh as well.

It's an illusion. The entire show.

For her, she steps behind the guise of an alter ego. The stage is a space she can claim her sexual power and maintain control over it. Because God,

if she did this elsewhere? Men would come to eagerly strip her of that power, stake their dominance, and rip away her independence.

Ironically, this is the safest space for her to bask in her sexuality.

I scoff, turning around and reaching for the small shot glass on the other side of the bar. It's been poured for someone else. I don't even know what liquor it holds—I don't care. I toss it to the back of my throat before dropping the glass to the counter and sending it sliding all the way over edge until it crashes to the ground.

"What the fuck, Skillz?" Aura barks, raising her eyebrows at me before reaching for another glass and pouring the shot again.

I'm still caught up in the vile taste of what I assume is—yep, she's pouring tequila—and I can't stop the way my mouth puckers up and my eyes squeeze shut while I process.

I still don't take the chaser she suddenly offers though; I want to feel this. Whatever it is. Almost as if it's a form of punishment for my reckless and pathetic mistakes.

Aura is still staring at me when I finally clear my vision and turn to face her. Her bright eyes burning in the darkness, her creamy skin shining amongst the filth and dirt of this club. How the fuck does she always look so...transcendent? No wonder Ruby fell for her as quickly as she did. She works as a bartender here now, dances every once in a while—usually with her girlfriend Ruby. I swear, they're going to get fucking hitched soon. I've never seen anyone as into each other as they are.

Well, aside from Calypso and K. Those two give them a run for their money. But I try to avoid all of them as often as I can.

It's embarrassing...being the one rejected for someone else. Not good enough, not pretty enough, not funny enough.

God, I could be sick.

"Mind your own goddamn business, Aura." I turn on my heels, hellbent on disappearing out of this club as quickly as possible.

"Seriously? Drop the fucking attitude already." Her voice takes on an edge, and her slim fingers dart forward and wrap tightly around my forearm as she pulls me back. I whip my head around and meet her gaze head on, anticipating the same fierce power behind her eyes I clearly hear in her words.

But it's not there.

“You can talk to us; you know that right?” she continues, her voice quieting and her tone turning slightly sympathetic. “Or...someone. Talk to someone.”

She pleads.

Sympathy. Pity. She feels sorry for me.

A sick and twisted smile pulls at the corner of my lips.

Fuck no.

“Fuck you and fuck off, *Vibe girl*.” I rip my arm out of her hold and stalk away. Silence follows behind me, aside from the usual rowdiness of the club around us.

She says nothing. She doesn’t follow. None of them would anyway. It’s simple pretense she holds, being the sweet and caring one of their little group. She puts in the minimal effort to seem invested in my happiness.

But none of them actually care.

No one ever has.

I step forward, shoving my way through drunk and lust consumed people. Mostly men, dressed up in casual suits with loosened ties and unbuttoned shirts. Fancy watches encase meaty wrists, and expensive shoes cover feet that were never meant to step inside this club.

All the secrets, all the hidden nights these men tell their wives they’re grabbing a beer with a friend at a local bar. No one suspects anything, and yet Chad over there is getting a lap dance from Shauna, his boner already sky fucking high as she dances against it.

I cringe even though this is my space. This is familiar. And at least she’ll have the money to pay her electricity this month. She’s been taking on extra shifts when she can.

I’m still watching, keeping an eye out in case Chad gets a little too handsy, when a set of fingers tightly grips my ass. Whipping around, I find a stranger, another man, laughing alongside his friends as they hold up a drink in my direction. Is that a fucking thank you?

“Touch me again and you’re eighty-sixed.” I don’t smile. I don’t offer a polite nod of the head. This outfit isn’t your ticket to this feast.

All of the men freeze, for only a moment, before raising their eyebrows in mockery. “It was a dare, sweet cheeks. Here, I’ll throw you a buck for it.” The first man scoffs as he reaches into his back pocket for what I assume is his wallet.

“Her ass wasn’t that great,” another man laughs, and the others immediately join in on vile comments.

For some strange reason, everything changes. My emotions shift from anger to insecurity. Rage to worry. Strength to weakness.

My eyes narrow, and I drop my gaze as the men laugh ahead of me. *Fuck*. I’ve gotten so good at not giving a single fuck what anyone says about me, and yet tonight is absolutely not my night. Not right now, and the sudden wash of embarrassment and self-loathing swamps my entire being.

I storm through crowded space as everything begins shrinking around me. I’m suddenly anxious, and my skin feels tight and itchy while my heart begins racing in my chest.

I just want out of here, away from these familiar faces. I feel like I know everyone on this side of Pandora’s Box. Every disgusting gaze settling on my quickly fleeting figure. Every stripper, every bartender, every set of eyes filled with varying degrees of desire, lust or pity.

My hand absently flies up and rests over my heart as I press down against my own skin. As if I can manually slow down it myself, my palm rubs rhythmic circles over the erratic pounding below.

Breathe, Skilla. Breathe.

My strappy leather bra wraps around my waist and ties at the small of my back, settling just above the matching harness that secures over my ass and thighs. I’m wearing a set of tight, black briefs. I wasn’t dancing tonight, and I wanted to be far more comfortable than my usual tiny G-string.

I’m thankful right now for every inch of clothing I have on, and I’m desperately wishing I had brought a change of clothes tonight.

But fuck it, I’m making a run for the Kink Club. There’s something far more comforting knowing I’ll be surrounded by people who know nothing of me. My own identity.

My own story.

My ability to lie and create something far bigger than the life I lead now is just beyond my reach.

So that’s it, right? If anyone asks who I am, what I’m doing here. I’ll lie. I’ll make up my own enticing past, something that proves just how strong I am on my own.

God, to be wanted. To be chosen. To know my worth is not determined by the ones who have used and tossed me to the side in the past.

No matter that my mind is telling me otherwise.

My sweaty hands fly forward and against the cool metal door that separates us from what lies on the other side. I've heard stories about this place, the dark and sadistic secrets explored within those walls.

They say there's something *otherworldly* about Pandora's Box. *Magical. Dark.* Disillusioned by every dark and deceitful desire you've kept tucked away in your innocent mind.

Those are all revealed here, in sexual exploration, exploitation, and submission.

I stumble through the door as I shove it forward, feeling a rush of air fill my lungs in a way I didn't anticipate. It's not like it isn't crowded here as well, but as soon as I meet the eyes of strangers, everything changes.

My hammering heartbeat slows incrementally. My skin cools at the same time a sweet heat bolts through my body. I step forward, releasing the door and letting my hands fall loosely at my sides.

Straightening my shoulders, I intentionally tilt my chin up and force a confidence I know I'm faking entirely.

But they don't know that, and the knowledge alone causes a subtle smirk to pull along my lips. I casually lift my arms up to my silky hair and untie it from the braid running down my back. My feet move steadily in the eight-inch heels I'm wearing and I'm grateful for the skill I've mastered through dance.

My eyes rake over and across the crowd dancing in front of me. Countless groups scatter the wide expanse of the club. It seems everyone is exploring each other's bodies in a melodic fusion of breathy moans and sinful slaps.

The walls are draped in black and red fabric, the floors covered in a velvet that spills over every silken couch and chaise lounge. The space is...grand, for lack of a better word.

It's something I could have never imagined if not seeing it for myself. The energy here is electric, and suddenly the few drinks and shots I've taken tonight feel heavier in my body and blood as I move. I can hardly remember why I was sprinting from the strip club in the first place.

Exactly what I needed.

The music is fast-paced, an enticing beat layered under the sounds of pleasure and release. It draws me closer, and as my skin brushes along anyone I'm passing while I walk, I feel more alive than I have in years.

How have I never been in here before now?

I find myself moving through people who captivate my gaze. At first glance, everyone looks normal, average even. But as my eyes remain resting on these magnetizing individuals, I'm realizing just how alluring everyone truly is. It feels like the space is glowing, heated with a fire lit energy that whips through our bodies and wraps around our throats.

We're connected. Each of us with each other and slowly my eyes begin colliding with individuals as I move closer to the bar.

"A shot of tequila," I say, forcing my tone strong and steady. My heart is racing and tiny goosebumps are breaking out along my skin, but I run my fingers swiftly over them, warming myself with my touch in hopes that I can keep this charade up even longer.

A tall man on the other side of the bar is pouring my shot. He's tall, at least six foot four, and covered head to toe in dark and intricate tattoos. Hell, even his eyes are inked black, the whites bleeding darkness around his irises. My eyes fall lower, noting the heavy veins running along his forearms, but it's when I drop further that I notice the scarring along his ribs.

Thick, jagged lines mar his decorated flesh. Four along each side, and when my head absently tilts, he's quick to step directly in front of me and slide the glass my way. "Eyes up here, sweet cheeks."

I snap up, a slight heat staining my cheeks as I instantly reach for the glass and toss the shot back before I have to respond. But once I set it back down, he's already pouring a second one and sliding it forward again.

"What? No. I only need one—" I start, but he nods his head back, indicating it's from someone else. "Who?" My eyes narrow as I look behind him, but it's nearly impossible to decipher anyone I could possibly know.

God, I hope it's no one I know.

"They'll find you."

I halt my search immediately, twisting my head back toward the bartender as he walks away with an arrogant glint pulling at his features. He's running his hands along a thin black towel, laughing quietly to

himself without another word before turning around and tucking it into his back pocket.

“Excuse me? What the fuck does that mean? Who’s going to find me?” I attempt shouting over the loud music, but it’s useless. And another part of me believes he wouldn’t answer if he did hear me.

He simply scoffs and moves to assist the next person standing at the bar without so much as a second glance toward me. Not fucking surprised, but as my gaze drops back to the single shot ahead of me, I run the tip of my finger slowly along the rim.

I shouldn’t get wasted tonight...I have to get home at some point and who knows exactly what state my apartment will be in at that point. But God, it feels good to let go. Hell, free drinks along with it? Maybe I should make the most of it tonight.

Without another cautionary thought, I down the second shot and endure the vile taste before slamming the glass back on the counter and turning around entirely. I press my lower back to the counter and rest my palms against the edge, watching the edges of my eyes go fuzzy while the liquor settles in my stomach.

So fucking gross. Yet the second I lean forward, I know the liquor is doing its job. My feet feel a bit unsteady, but nothing I haven’t handled before and I confidently step forward as I inhale a deep breath and regain my mental footing.

Confident. Sexy. Empowered.

I remind myself of the intention I have for tonight and as I repeat those words over and over in my mind, it’s as if my entire being begins to believe them. My hips sway with the music as I move through the crowd and head toward the center of the club. This is where most of the dancing is taking place, and I’ll have a decent view of the entire space if I can climb on one of those platforms.

Poles are scattered on raised pedestals throughout the dance floor, and a few of them are occupied by men and women in strange costumes. A man with an entirely tattooed chest dances against one, but wild and grotesque horns spiral out from the top of his head. Another girl, with long, straight ice white hair dances against the other, her creamy skin marred in red stripes that have me narrowing my gaze in question.

What in the world are these people dressed as? I absently wonder, but my body continues moving to the music in sexy sways and I drift my

hands over my own figure. I love music, and in this space, around these people, I feel intoxicated by far more than just the Tequila.

I inch close to a third platform, this one empty, and notice few eyes suddenly turning in my direction. I continue dancing and lift my hands to twist in the long strands of my hair before letting my fingers trail sensual patterns along my neck. Tilting my head back, I reach up and grip the bottom of the pole using it as an anchor to pull myself up and onto the platform.

I feel it the second I'm standing on top. Countless eyes darting my direction, as if they can all feel the anticipation burning in my blood. The energy spikes around me in tangible waves of eroticism and enticement. I don't even know how I understand it, how I can distinguish these feelings so easily, but the excitement whirls in thick tension and propels me forward.

I'm eager. Ready. And dying to let go of the disheartening weight my identity inevitably carries.

My back arches against the chill of the pole and I drop my hands to my thighs as I begin dancing. My fingers trail over the edge of my panties, teasing them against my skin while I crouch down and roll my hips forward. Every wave of music is like a whip through my body, pulling and snapping through my frame while electrifying the energy surrounding me.

Everything feels hotter, and when I dare to open my eyes, I realize my small platform is absolutely swallowed by the crowd of people around me. Couples are dancing together, and the simple sight of watching their bodies grind together turns me on. My lips fall open, and my eyes are glued to everyone basking in this ambiance, while my body and mind respond in a primal need for more.

A smile pulls across my face and my eyes continue scanning the space of sexy, illicit endeavors. Aside from the dancing, I can vaguely make out small groupings of what seems to be sex, or kinky scenes playing out before me. I continue dancing, moving around the pole while intentionally taking in the sights around me. I try to rein in my own desire, forcing myself to focus enough to determine where I should explore once I'm finished up here.

But it's when I'm twisting and throwing my leg around the pole that something shifts in the atmosphere.

In a single instant, everything turns cold. Ice. A freeze. A blast of something practically paralyzing rushes across my skin and snakes around my throat.

I halt, immediately, as if my body already knows how to respond.

As if it knows I need to stand still. A silent demand being spoken through my blood.

What the fu—

“Here, here, little kitty.” A high and playfully seductive voice suddenly cracks through the chaotic sound around me. But no one else hears her, and I’m shocked at the way she easily makes herself known only to me.

My eyes fall, instantly, and I meet the bright smile of a girl with wild purple hair.

Jesus Christ. She’s stunning.

And I don’t even mean that in a strictly physical way. Even though that’s true as well. But this is different, it’s a life vibrating through her entire being, jumping in every lilt and swirl of her voice. She lifts a slender hand, her nails are long and sharp like little claws that match her hair. She’s beckoning me to climb down, and for a split moment, I pause, as if my body suddenly remembers it has its own free will.

I’m quick to comply however, immediately crouching down and sliding my fingers into hers like I’m meant to be there. Silently, she smiles, arrogance and knowledge written all over her face. As soon as my feet hit the ground she tugs me against her, brushing her crimson stained lips over my ear as she whispers.

“This isn’t the place for you, New Girl. What a dangerous little mistake you’ve made.” The words fall free of her mouth and lick over my skin. I’m fucking wet, and I can’t even begin to explain what that means. I’m seduced to step closer, feeling her warm skin against mine as if she carries the essence of life within her. And yet, I’m terrified all the same. My logical mind alerting and screaming and begging for me to heed her words.

I’ve made a mistake.

So, why can’t I pull free and turn around like I want to? Why can’t I run away from this moment, break free of her strong gaze and the intoxicating cherry brown eyes staring back at me?

Something is wrong here, and I strangely don’t want to find a way free.

Even though her words warn me away, her seductive and arrogant smile says otherwise. She knows I'll stay, and my hands slip around her waist as she starts stepping backward. We move easily through the crowd, my eyes stuck on hers until they drift lower and over her body.

She's all slim curves. A narrow waist that flares out to gorgeous hips and a round ass. Her tits are high and spilling out over the baby pink harness she has strapped around her chest. Layered underneath is a black mesh long sleeve, and peeking out are the long and intricate tattoos decorating her skin. Swirls of black twist around her biceps and snake down her forearms. Long vines of leaves and beautifully detailed flowers mark her flesh as if she's nature and life and energy all wrapped into one invigorating essence.

"You like?" she asks as her hands leave my skin and lift over her head. She begins dancing, twirling in front of me as though she's showing me every inch of her stunning tattoos. They're everywhere, and my eyes bounce around her frame while I try taking her in.

"Love." I find myself murmuring under my breath. I swear she can't hear it, but the little smile and giggle she releases tells me otherwise.

"You're going to be fun," she replies, continuing the sultry yet sassy sway of her hips as she moves to the upbeat music. I want to move closer, but something holds me back a few inches as I begin dancing myself. There's a space between us I want to swallow, but an invisible pull keeps us just barely apart. "Can't come any closer, can you, sweet Skilla?"

I pause, my brows furrowing together while my mind tries to replay what she just said. The alcohol sloshes through my blood but so does the intoxicating atmosphere around me. I feel a bit dizzy, but it comes with a taste of euphoria rather than fear and lack of control. "How did you know my name?"

"I know a lot of things about you." She giggles again and steps back, lifting a finger and urging me closer.

I obey, and the second I step forward she throws her head back and laughs again. "Oh God, will you put up any sort of fight? Or are you the sweet, quiet girl I bet on in the beginning?"

Halting again, I try forcing my feet back a step. I barely make it, and suddenly a rush of uncertainty flows through me.

What in the fuck is happening right now? To my body? In my mind? Who is this girl and why does she think she knows me?

She notices my back step and nods in what seems to be approval. “Good, good. You’ll need that fight if you’re to survive Lilith.” And then she laughs again, her hand flying up and covering her mouth as her eyes go wide and her eyebrows lift to the sky. “And Na’amie? God, she’ll rip you to shreds sweet kitty.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” I bite out, keeping a sharp edge to my voice while I create my own persona. This is my new beginning; this is where I show these people who I want to be. *Who I am.*

Not who I’ve been known as.

Anger and frustration roll through me, and my skin shifts from this icy freeze to a sharp edge of fire. I’m warring between countless sensations, and before I can comprehend what’s happening, I realize she’s led us into a back hallway on the other side of the club.

Red velvet lines the walls and floor around me, and the dim lights feel even darker as shadows begin swelling her body as we move. I want to stop and I’m able to slow my steps but that’s nearly impossible on its own. It suddenly feels like the air moves in thicker waves, like a blanket of snow slowly falling all around me. Fear begins slithering in my stomach, and all I can make out as I follow her are the bright bounces to her curls and those strangely glowing claws on tips of her fingers.

“Where are you taking me?” I snap, wishing I could turn around and run away from her now. She was right, I should have never came here. But I’ll be damned if I go down without a fight.

“Playing with our food, sister?” A new voice. One that’s poison to my ears. The lower tenor, filling the cold space with a terrifying edge. I can feel it everywhere, without seeing the newcomer at all. Somehow, this sound is indescribably different than the first, and my body feels the intrinsic need to twist away from it.

I need to get out of her. Now.

“You know I can’t ignore such a treat.” Purple hair’s tone changes as well, into something dark and seductive. Her hands dart forward and wrap tightly around each of my forearms, yanking me toward her and submerged in complete darkness. Her claws scrape into my skin so deep I worry she’ll draw blood. But maybe that’s what she wants, and my heart rate spikes as a heavier fear builds in my chest.

“Let go of me,” I grind out between clenched teeth, tugging on my arms as I try to pull away from her. Her hold doesn’t even budge, instead,

it grows tighter, digging deeply into my flesh as I hiss at the pain. “Seriously, who the fuck do you think you are?”

Suddenly, a new hand brushes against my skin. Strong fingers move across the front of my throat, slowly, intentionally, holding a power that completely freezes me in this moment.

I’m paralyzed by both anticipation and panic. This hold grows tighter, just barely, and tugs me back against a slender chest while the other girl continues restricting my arms. Cold lips graze over my ear, and I can feel how tall this one is behind me. The energy in our space drops countless degrees in temperature. The heat of anger and frustration have been completely quenched by the frost of overwhelming power.

“Afraid, little kitty?” The lower tenor slips into my ears and my head falls back before I have a chance to stop it. I inhale deeply, consumed by whatever toxicity she’s breathing into me. I’m trembling, and she knows it. I can feel my body shaking against hers. “Good.”

This is wrong. Every hair on the back of my neck is standing straight. Alarms and red flags are sounding within me, screaming and shouting for me to get out of this as quickly as possible.

And yet I cannot. I can’t. This new creature towering over my back is holding onto me with so much more than a single hand.

I can’t explain what’s happening. I have no logical reasoning behind why it’s taking place like this. But it is, and while half of me wants to kick and fight and draw blood, the other half wants to surrender entirely to this dangerous death.

I’ll disappear completely if it means doing it with this hand around my throat and those icy lips against my heated skin.

In an instant, purple hair steps closer while the one behind closes me in completely. Both women have their hands on me somewhere, while the fingers around my throat keep me still. Lips, from the both of them move closer, drifting along my shoulder, my collar bone, my jaw line, without a single kiss or nip or bite.

It’s like their inhaling my own energy, sucking me dry while I come apart between them. My heartbeat is thundering in my chest, my mind spiraling in all the countless ways I’m most likely going to die tonight.

I should have never come to this side of the club. I knew strange things happened here.

And yet I feel oddly at peace in the midst of my own chaotic fear....as if this is familiar. As if these hands were always meant to be on me. This energy was intended to intoxicate my own.

“What are your names?” I finally breathe the words out on a desperate whisper, hoping they’ll at least give me this before slitting my throat.

The one behind me halts her movements, her lips grazing over the bend in my neck while her thumb presses into my jaw. But purple hair is the first to answer, her tone just as playful and entertained as it was before. “I’m Aggie,” she chimes in, moving her face so that it’s directly in front of mine. I can’t see her clearly, but I can feel her eyes boring into me and I absently wonder if she can see perfectly in the darkness. “And this is my sister, Na’amah.”

Na’amah.

Unique. Cold. Distant. Those are the first words that spring to my mind when I hear the name.

Things change when she mentions her sister, her tone falls into something a bit lower. The name alone holds a tangible power. I can feel it in the tension building between all of us, drowning me in the obvious strength behind the woman at my back. I feel her lips pull into a smile against my skin, and her free hand falls to my waist and slips over my lower stomach as she drags me back against her.

“My sister likes you better with that braid you wore earlier,” Aggie whispers, sliding her hand around the back of my neck and into my hair. She wraps it around her fist, pulling it all to the side while she forces my head over. My neck is elongated and exposed for her sister, and I immediately feel her teeth drag along my flesh before she finally speaks again.

I’m eager for it. Peculiarly, she’s the voice I want to hear.

“I do,” she breathes out, finally letting those lips fall to my skin completely. Her kiss is anything but gentle. I’m making a consistent reckless decision allowing her to do this. I can’t fucking help it. “Something I can hold onto while I fuck your face and you’re on your knees.”

What the hell is wrong with me? Jesus Christ. Her words are filthy and fucked up. But they slide along my skin and light little fires in my blood. My body responds instinctually as a shiver races down my spine. I wish I could stop it, control the disgusting ways my body is betraying me now.

She doesn't even know me, and while I'm used to vile language on the other side of the club, I'm taken aback by it coming from this stranger.

But there's something else. A stronger, compelling draw within me that forces me to stay. I can't explain it properly, not in a way that truly makes sense. But suddenly, everything feels clearer inside of me. As if I can discern each individual beat of my heart, the actual temperature of my breath as it skates over my lips. Even the flow of my blood under my skin and in my veins.

And it all draws me closer to the frightening being at my back.

A cackle reverberates in front of me as Aggie throws her head back. She's enjoying this far too much, and I wish more than anything I could turn around and see who the fuck is touching me. Aggie is like a flame, billowing and blazing around me, while Na'amah is a wild, uncontrollable storm at my back. She's wind and ice, frost and freeze, building a wall of something that feels empty and terrifying while Aggie burns me alive. Both of them have practically opposite energies, and I don't know how to escape this.

But in that instant, something clicks, and I know what exactly to do in order to distract them.

Play into it. This little game of cat and mouse. While they think they've got me cornered, I'll show them how easily I can escape..

That's my forte as it is, right? *Easily forgotten, quick to vanish.* Now, I'm learning I can use that as my strength, rather than shrinking behind it as I have in the past.

I press forward, pushing my forearms against Aggie's chest willingly. She's caught off guard for a split second, but holds her ground almost as quickly. She's allowing me a bit of movement, so I lean closer, trusting the darkness to shield the clear uncertainty surely evident in my eyes. I brush my lips against her jaw, faking a smile while my fingers drag over her shoulder. I'm guessing as I move, but luck is finally on my side and she offers me more of her skin. Her head falls to the side and I kiss her, slipping my tongue out and down the curve of her neck.

"Is this what you want?" I ask quietly, listening as she sucks in a breath and her fingers grip my waist. She pulls me tightly against her, and Na'amah is utterly silent while she moves with me. "Do you want to fuck me?" I continue, hoping that my brazen words are enough to surprise her so I can slip away. I doubt they want to hook up, this feels far more

dangerous than that. “Or do you want me to fuck you?” Just as I prepare myself to dart to the side, I kiss her again, this time lifting to her lips in falsely confident move.

Throw her off, jump to the side and out of their hold, make an absolute run for the fucking crowd. That’s the plan.

But this was the biggest mistake I’ve made so far—putting my lips on her like this. Immediately, I’m drowning. In every single sense of the word. It feels like death, but the sweetest I could ever imagine. I can’t breathe, my skin is on fire, my hands desperate to touch her and fuck her and feel her.

I want to be under her skin, inside her blood, shifting against her bones while she moans around me.

Fighting the immediate urge to fully succumb, I attempt pulling away, but it’s weak at best and suddenly I’m shoving her forward until her back hits the wall behind her.

Her head falls back and one of her hands tighten around the back of my neck, yanking me closer as I unravel against her. I’m wet, that slick heat between my thighs pounding in need and desire. I’m never this turned on, and I can’t explain for a single second why I need this so badly now.

I slide my hand down the front of her chest and run my thumb over her stiff nipple, hearing her moan just slightly as I touch her. I can still feel Na’amah’s hands on my throat, her other holding me back just slightly as I continue touching her sister. I move my hand lower, determined to see just how wet she is now as well.

But right as my fingers slip under the thin band of her panties, everything goes numb.

My back suddenly slams against a hard surface, my head smashing the same space before falling forward. A shrill ringing sounds in my ears and I struggle to lift my hands in order to stifle the sound. “What the fu—” I manage to stutter, but everything comes into focus when a pair of bright, sharp blue eyes blaze in front of me.

Ice blue. Bright. Fucking electric. If the color could be alive with movement and power, it would be.

My mind shorts out, literally stalls in thoughts as I fall under her gaze. Her rosy lips are pulled back, revealing white teeth that surprisingly come to points on the edge. I try to focus on what that means, process what I’m seeing—but I can’t.

Nothing inside of me is working, and all I can see is the creature in front of me. Tall, slender, narrow shoulders and sharp collar bones. She's wearing a light blue crop top, ripped and distressed in certain places as it clings to her bronze skin. But it's almost as if she's glowing, her energy is alight, and revealing her in this darkness.

I don't even know how this is possible. It's not. And yet I'm here, pinned against the wall, watching her small tits heave up and down with every angered breath. "That's what you think? That she wants to fuck you? Or that she'd give any ounce of her energy in allowing you to fuck her?" She leans forward as she speaks, that whiskey smooth voice slicing my skin in embarrassment. "You're pathetic. A human." She laughs, leaning even closer as she brings her chest flush against mine. The ringing in my ears halts completely, and suddenly her hand wraps tightly around my throat as she forces my eyes up into hers. She's fucking tall, and it's now that I see her long white hair is pulled up into a bone straight ponytail, shaved closely on the sides in decorative patterns.

Like wind. Snow. Swirls of the storm clearly building inside her. I try to look elsewhere, and my stomach twists in an anxious need to disappear. I feel small in more ways than one. This is exactly what I wanted to fucking avoid, and somehow I've found myself here all over again.

So, why am I still turned on? Why is my core pounding even harder than it was before, why are my fingers aching to touch her now? This energy, this person in front of me, she drowns out any thoughts I ever had of Aggie a few minutes ago. Hell, her sister doesn't even exist to me now. And all I fucking want is this one's approval.

Her approval.

Wow. That's fucked.

"I'm sorry," I murmur quietly, my lips speaking the words before turning into a meek little beg.

"Sorry for what?" she replies. Her voice is flat and strong as she shifts my hands with one of hers and pins them over my head. "Tell me what you're apologizing for."

I hesitate, nervous and anxious to give the correct answer. The entire last thirty minutes of my existence is foggy, each memory a confusing and overwhelming replay in my head. "For...for—" I stutter, and squeeze my eyes shut briefly in frustration while I attempt producing the right words. My throat is dry, my tongue heavy in mouth while I speak.

“Leave her alone.”

Jesus fuck, another new voice? Each one more terrifying than the girl before it. For fuck’s sake, this one is thick with royalty and arrogance. I can already tell she doesn’t play games, and Na’amah is quick to turn her head and look back over her shoulder.

“Lilith,” she speaks, her tone taking on a slight edge of what I believe is irritation. Her hold on me tightens ever so slightly, and her frame shifts subtly closer at the same moment. “I can break her.”

What? Break me? Are you serious?

I remain quiet, simply existing in the frigid atmosphere around us. Aggie is silent as well and I can hardly make out the edge of the figure behind Na’amah. All I can make out in this moment is she’s taller than both of these sisters, her skin creamy white, and she has long, straight black hair. She stands perfectly still; her mere presence holds a powerful tension I’m tangibly feeling within me.

“She’s already broken.” Lilith speaks the words and for some reason, they sting. Instantly. It feels like a dagger, slicing straight through my heart and spilling out every insecurity, every weakness, every fear out on the ground in front of them. “She’s fragile. I have no need of her.”

Why do I feel the need to defend myself? I do. I want to scream and kick and fight back, explaining every single reason why I am good enough for whatever most likely fucked up ritualistic bullshit they want to put me through. I should be happy they want nothing to do with me, this is my fucking moment to escape and never these freaks again.

Never see them again

And now my heart is pounding with a sudden strange ache at the thought.

It’s then that Na’amah looks back at me, her distant eyes glazing in defeat and surrender. “She’s right,” she whispers, a certain disgust lacing her voice as she says it. “You’re worthless.” She shoves me back and steps away, shifting into line with the other two at her sides. I’m paralyzed in place, trying to focus on each of their faces before they disappear.

I want to step forward, move nearer at the same time I realize this is my chance to run. But I can’t move, in either direction, closer or farther away.

“Go home, sweet Kitten. This isn’t the place for you,” Aggie again reminds me, just before the three of them vanish at the exact same

moment.

“Wai—” I start, suddenly able to lunge forward the moment their gone. “Wait,” I find myself whispering, and the painful ache in my chest explodes full force.

Goddamn it. What the hell just happened?

CHAPTER TWO

NA'AMAH

“**Y**ou both really kill the fuckin’ mood, you know that?” Aggie states, clear disappointment drowning her tone. “I was having such a fun time.”

“You having fun fucks over the rest of us, you know that right?” I spit out, dragging the palms of my hands down the front of my thighs. I need that girl’s scent off my skin or it’ll linger there all night and I’m already losing my fucking mind being that close to her.

She was different. And not in a good fucking way.

My pants are a light khaki, cinched up around my lower legs and with enough pockets to hold each of my weapons. Satan knows I can’t count on my sisters to fucking protect us. I’ll have to toss these after I feed tonight; get every messy act out of the way before discarding them completely.

“It’s not my fault you’re starving. I told you to eat before we left. Didn’t I, sister? You heard me.” Aggie turns to Lilith, who walks with obvious distaste in her stride. She’s irritated and I can’t blame her for it honestly.

We’ve struggled in finding her final bride. The one she’s actually meant to spend the rest of eternity with. I have five of her harem trained and serving the kingdom, but the final seventh is what she needs to finally take her throne beside Lucifer.

Fucking Luce. An absolute constant thorn in my goddamn side.

“Another night wasted, darling?” *Right on cue.*

“Please, for the love of all that is—” Aggie starts, but Lucifer is quick to interrupt her. Not surprising...he loves being the center of attention.

“If you say *holy*, you’re going straight to Heaven and I will be entirely thrilled by it.” He saunters into the grand room of our separate castle here in the Underworld. Each level is sanctioned and ruled by the entities he places in order. Of course, he wants to handle everything himself, which is why he’s always kept us four queens under wraps as long as possible.

But we don’t stay quiet for long, and we let him have his fun while we build our own kingdom before taking our rule. Lucifer has been strengthening the Underworld against its opposition for years now. But things have gotten a bit out of hand as of late, with the outside warriors of Sunan coming forth with recent attacks in the city. We know she’s kidnapped Amelia, a little half-blood who spent her life serving for her mother. And we haven’t been able to nail her location down after a small spat took place on the outskirts of New York City.

Lucifer works with both the Fallen Angels and Demons to help dismantle her army and rescue Amelia, while myself and my sisters put forth our efforts in solidifying the Underworld’s population down here. He may make it seem like we’re all about parties and orgasms, but there is an entire system to this kingdom, and someone has to maintain the order and rule of this place as well.

“Why are you here again? I know for a fact you haven’t broken that little witch enough to bore you, have you?” Lilith turns and takes a seat in one of the four grand thrones in our great hall. The floors are covered in black granite, the walls draped in the colors of each of us.

Blue is the my representation of power in ice and wind. I maintain order, and am the warrior and strength for the four of us.

Black is Lilith’s, her powers lie in vitality and corruption.

Purple for Aggie, the little over dramatic divination queen.

Then there is Eisheth, the perfect blend of all four of us. She tends to oversee everything, and while she may seem peaceful and calm, there’s a storm inside her unlike any of us hold. She’s the calm, right before she lays waste to everyone around her.

“You could give her to me. I’d love a few hours in a dark room with that spiteful, naked little thing.” I smirk, stepping up the couple of stairs before turning and resting in my own ice covered throne.

Lucifer lunges toward me in instant, moving quicker than lightning in a feeble attempt at an attack. As if he has any strength over me. I lift one

leg and quickly jam it forward and into his ribs, bearing my fangs in an arrogant hiss.

“Do not touch her,” he threatens, his eyes turning black and his own long fangs escaping his lips.

“Wow, revealing the bite are you? Didn’t think you’d give that to anyone. I’m flattered.” I laugh as he uses his hands to shove my foot away from his torso. He stands up, intentionally straightening his now disheveled black button down and rolls his long sleeves tightly up his forearms. His tattoos span the length of every exposed portion of his skin.

Just like us. We’ve all been marked in the name of our powers.

“You know what I’m here for, Lilith.” He turns his attention to our sister, his gaze taking a stony turn and his shoulders setting back. I must say, as much as I enjoy giving him shit and threatening his little witch, I’m not naive enough to think he couldn’t put up a damn good fight against me if he had to.

I don’t know who would win. But I’d go down with every bit of strength and power I had. He’s practically invincible, and the only one to ever take on a God on his own. But we don’t mention that; it’s the war that severed the Universe at the beginning of time.

“I know, Luce. I know. I haven’t found her yet, but I will.” Lilith leans back and lets her eyes fall shut. I can feel the weight of anticipation filling this room. The tension of the unknown, and when I glance to Lilith’s side, I notice the way her skin pulls tighter and small veins of black pulse under her eyes.

“You don’t have much time,” he whispers, and I hate to see the way his gaze falters in the moment.

“I am well aware.”

“We’ll complete the harem, Lucifer. You have our word. We won’t lose her.” This time, Eisheth’s voice breaks through the hall as she steps forward and strides toward us. Her long, emerald green gown trails at her back and the way her vibrant red hair falls over her shoulders has me pausing to stare. She’s stunning, the youngest one of us all, and still the one who holds the most hope.

My sister, Lilith, is fading quickly. She must feed from eternal blood in order to live and previously, Lucifer was the only one who could sustain her. They have a troublesome past, and once he was cursed, Lilith lost her only life force. It’s been years now, centuries even, and we’ve sustained

her only through spells by the most powerful covens and small traces of eternal blood from simple mortals.

That's why Skilla alerted Aggie's radar tonight. We could smell the faintest amount of eternity in her flesh. It's incredibly rare, and if we could add her to Lilith's harem, she could be another force in offering us more time to find Lilith's Fated. It only took a moment for Aggie's mind to pick up on the distinction in her blood. The second she walked into the club, her energy and scent overtook every other immortal in the room given the fact that the kink portion of the club is primarily used by Fallen Angels and Demons. Every creature, in this realm and others, derives from the Fallen or Demonic races. This side of Pandora's Box has been known to be a meeting ground—or play ground—for our kind to gather.

Aggie has a knack for reading energy, and if she makes physical contact, she can easily slip into the recesses of their minds and hear their thoughts.

So she knew, from the moment she pulled her down from the pole, that she was a fragile little thing. At first, I thought that would play well into my ability to break her. Train her into the submissive Lilith needs in the midst of her harem. She has to be able to take the bite in the first place. As a celestial being, feeding is a far stronger and more intense experience than the average vampire.

Vampires. Such a mundane and smaller version of what we are. Few can actually sustain the overwhelm of sensations experienced while we feed. It's comparable to an immediate overdose on drugs. Hard to survive once it's already intoxicated your blood. This is why we feed from those carrying eternal blood, which often times are witches. Mortals who have trace amounts of celestial magic within them. Not enough to harbor an immortal being, but enough to maintain their own power and magic within the human world.

We're all motivated through our thirst for blood and our sexual energy. All four of us have roots within the succubus bloodlines. We feed and sustain ourselves through eternal blood, but also draw from the energy of sex and sexual tension. This is why Pandora's Box is the ideal place for us to find our life forces. If you're at that kink club, you generally have some sort of tie to the paranormal. Whether you are a witch, or a Demon—you're there for a reason.

“If we used Skilla, we’d be able to buy a bit more time in finding Lilith’s final bride.” Aggie offers the sentiment again, but we all know Skilla couldn’t survive it. We felt it the minute Aggie pulled her into the space with me. We evoked her sexual energy, felt her physical body, her strength. Looked for the ways she’d fight against the pull, if at all.

But she didn’t, not nearly well enough. We need the ones who can push back, who have enough strength to ride out the euphoric high from the feed and survive it. She’d never be able to—it would kill her in an instant.

“You know why we can’t,” I remind her, the exhaustion from hunger suddenly growing in my stomach. Now that I’m coming down from the high of the club, the effects of not feeding in several days is becoming far more apparent.

“She’d never work,” Lilith states quietly as she leans her head back and her eyes slip shut. The obvious marks of hunger mar her skin, soft veins glistening through her flesh, dark marks like bruises over her forearms. Her blood is growing restless, fighting against her body to sustain itself.

“Keeping you alive is worth the fucking risk,” Aggie bites out, her spiteful temper sparking in her words. “I’ve seen her past, she’s been through a lot. She may be broken now, but it took a lot to get her there. She may be able to handle the feed if she trains well with Naamie. Maybe we extend her sessions, go slower with her than the other girls.” She steps forward, coming to stand in front of both Lilith and I. I can see the pain her eyes, the desperation to fix things as much as she can.

It’s difficult enough finding someone with eternal blood, so when we know they aren’t strong enough for the bite, it hurts far worse than not finding anyone at all. And it’s been six months since we found the last girl...and she didn’t make it.

“We aren’t risking that again,” Lilith responds, intentionally taking slow and deep breaths while her fingers tighten around the arms of her throne.

“Who can I bring you?” Eisheth asks in concern. We can all see, practically feel the starvation running through Lilith. The difference between her and us, is that Lilith can *only* survive on eternal blood. Both her and Lucifer were cursed in the Great War. While the rest of us thrive on eternal, we can at least quench the edge of hunger on mortal blood. It

won't make us stronger, it won't completely fulfill us, but we can live on it if necessary.

"No one, the girls need their rest. They've been feeding far too often as it is." Lilith finally opens her eyes, her voice taking a sharp turn in demand as she responds. She'll fight us on this, but none of us are willing to lose her for the life of a mortal girl.

"You need some—" I begin, knowing I'm the only one who will oppose Lilith in this way. The other girls stay in their place once she demands it.

I won't though.

"No," she cuts me off, and at the same time, a dark wave of shimmering veins suddenly pulses under her skin. She arches her back in clear discomfort, a quiet muted groan only barely escaping her lips. Her mouth falls open, and her fangs reveal themselves uncontrollably.

"Get Thalia," I order as I look to Eisheth. She nods and immediately turns to rush out of the room.

"No!" Lilith yells, her voice booming through the space while the walls shake at the minimal power she unleashes.

I stand and move toward her, placing my hands over her forearms and biting my nails into her skin. It pierces easily and Lilith's eyes glare into my own, hers turning black with the incredible power she has rolling through her flesh. "Do not test me, Na'amah. Do not fight me on this," she whispers, her fangs still bared as she speaks.

"You couldn't fight me if you tried, sweet sister," I snap, squeezing even tighter as crimson blood spills from her skin. "Try again," I demand, forcing her arms still while she writhes in front of me.

"Stop, Naamie," Eisheth interrupts. I can hear the slight edge of worry in her tone, but this is what I'm designed for.

I push and push and push until you break.

"Try again." My words are an order and Lilith knows this. Her eyes don't leave mine as veins of black spiral down her cheeks and her fangs flare with a need for hunger.

She lunges again, this time using the entire force of her body to throw herself forward. I know what she's trying to do; she assumes the momentum will work to give her an advantage in throwing me off. But it doesn't, and I shove her back against her throne again while the cuts in her

arms begin their slow process of healing. For us, it's almost instantaneous, for her, it's a much longer, much more painful journey.

In the next few moments, while Lilith rests her eyes and focuses on steadying her breath, Thalia hurries in the room after Eisheth summons her. She's beautiful, and her short, vibrant red hair hangs just across her shoulders. Her olive toned skin gives light to her Latin descent, and her sultry voice has been one of Lilith's utmost favorite attributes. She is quick to arrive and offer her vein. Thalia has always been one of Lilith's strongest brides, and easily survives the Bite every time she takes it.

Because of this however, Thalia feeds us quite often, and helps manage the other girls as Lilith's health fades. They all have an attachment to Lilith, a special, unique connection that binds them to her. They each had to give themselves willingly, and because of this, Lilith has fallen in love with each of them—both soul and heart.

"No," Lilith grinds out through clenched teeth the moment Thalia enters the room. She can smell her, feel her in her blood almost as the Fated do. This connection is different however, it's between a Vampire and their life essence versus their...equal if you will.

"Always," Thalia is quick to refute, stepping up to her throne and yanking her long sleeve quickly up her forearm. "You must, Lilly."

"Absolutely not. I will not risk your life, Thalia." She forces the words out of her mouth, but I can already feel her energy faltering at the offer of food.

"I am strong enough and you know this. Give me the Bite and let me take care of you. Stop being so fucking stubborn." Thalia's voice takes a frustrated turn and my eye brows dart upwards at her dominant remark. Even my sisters aren't quite as bold when addressing Lilith. But Thalia has always been a fighter, ever since we found her on the streets of Puerto Rico.

Lilith doesn't say a word, but I know her decision is made when she forces her head to the side and refuses to look at Thalia any longer. Her chest is heaving with each labored breath, and I'd love to say her resistance is waning—but it isn't. And I know there's only one thing I can do in order to make Lilith fucking feed.

As soon as I have the thought, I react. Because I know it'll be mere split seconds before Lilith is responding and my sisters are intervening.

So, in an instant, I reach for Thalia's arm myself and drop my fangs, piercing her skin deep enough to spill blood on the granite floor below us.

Lilith snaps, everything inside of her coming alive and on fire at the threat to her loved one. I knew this was dangerous, and I'd most likely die if she had any sort of considerable health still flowing through her body. But as she launches herself directly at me and my hands fly up as I release Thalia, I underestimate just how weak Lilith truly is.

I'm knocked on my ass in a mere second, the wind escaping my lungs as an intense shockwave of pain washes through me. Lilith's fangs are bared, sharp and extended in a way I know she means to rip out my entire throat for touching what belongs to her. I can vaguely hear Thalia in the background, but she isn't screaming, she isn't angry. If anything, she sounds mildly bored, and she's calling for Lilith to feed rather than kill her favorite sister.

I manage to wrap my hand around her throat, my fingers gripping her jaw tightly as I force her head back and toward Thalia once again. I nod Thalia's way, urging her to step closer so my sister can get a better scent of her blood.

The second she does, everything changes. Lilith's body goes cold and still over mine. The signs of hunger bloom again across her skin in an instant, and a single swipe of her tongue is all she needs to taste the scent of Thalia's blood in the air around us. Thalia moves even closer, her wrist offered out and shifting closer to Lilith's face like a gift.

An exchange happens between the both of them, something unspoken, but none the less powerful and intimate.

It's in that very next moment Lilith is uncontrollably and terrifyingly unleashed in order to feed.

A deadly task that leaves Thalia screaming and pleading for mercy.

CHAPTER THREE

Skilla

My mind is a whirlwind.

Manic thoughts of what happened tonight race through me. I'm replaying every moment, every touch, every word, *that voice*.

Over and over and over again.

What did happen tonight? Genuinely. Actually. How was all of that real in any sort of capacity.

And that's when it hits me, the most obvious and logical answer to all of this.

I'm fucking crazy. I am losing my goddamn mind after all. For fuck's sake, I know I've dealt with some shit over the last couple of years...hell, over the majority of my life. But I thought I'd been handling it decently. Drugs, alcohol, numbing the pain with mediocre methods of temporary satisfaction.

That's what all of this is anyway, right? An addict, snorting coke in strip club bathrooms and off dancer's tits. An alcoholic on her seventh shot of Tequila while every memory of pain and regret quietly slips to the background.

Background noise. That's what it becomes. But all of these toxic coping mechanisms are cheap replacements for what we truly want. They're a quick fix for our deepest needs.

Being wanted. Being loved, included, welcomed, heard, seen. *Fucking seen.*

Do a couple lines if no one's watching, that'll change everything. You won't need any of that bullshit external, shallow validation.

But fuck, tonight was different. And that one girl—she was a drug entirely on her own. One I’ve never taken and one I’d gladly overdose on in a second.

It sounds pathetic, but there was an awakening inside of me while she was near. It’s completely dormant now that she’s gone, and I’m damn near desperate to feel whatever that was again.

A stirring. A clawing under my skin and in my blood. My mind surrenders to the memory of her hands on my skin, and Aggie is all but completely numb compared to the feeling Na’amah. I wish I knew why she was different, but it felt as though a part of myself was designed to rest within her.

God, that’s fucking stupid and I instantly shake my head at the thought, forcing it free of my mind.

“Do not get wrapped up in another girl, Skilla. Don’t you fucking dare.” A sudden onslaught of memories over the last few years stampedes my mind. Moments wrapped up in sheets with Ruby, or against brick walls with K. Snarky and detached comments that I fed off of entirely because I was starving. Hungry for an affection I thought I needed. I welcomed their mediocre left overs with open arms, convincing myself it was real when I knew it wasn’t.

I always knew they felt nothing. But sometimes, living inside a false reality constructed in your mind is far better, far easier than facing the truth. So, I’ve recently taken up reading, intentionally choosing to lose myself in entirely different worlds I know nothing of. There’s something profound about that, not knowing exactly where I’m going while I read. It keeps me distracted, and helps me to actively force my feelings away from the new girl I met tonight. I can’t wait to get inside to finally pick up that book, forgetting about everything I’ve already experienced earlier.

I step up to the grand white double doors resting at the head of this beautiful home. Four tall, white pillars line the front porch, and a quaint little bench swing silently sways on the right hand side. Green garlands run an aesthetically pleasing frame around the front doors, and two impeccably matching wreaths hang on either side. Greenery with little red berries and flocked leaves of snow.

This is my home.

But not really.

It’s his.

I slide my key into the lock, twisting it to the right until I feel the deadbolt release completely. Once I've tucked my keys between my fingers, I use my other hand to push down the black iron latch and pull the door open. A fresh breeze of cedar and pine wafts over me, a sure sign some of our favorite candles must be burning in the dining hall.

Holding my breath, I slip out of my heels and hold them in my hand, stepping inside and quietly shutting the door behind me. If I can just sneak in and up to my room before he—

"Jesus, Skilla, where have you been?" The rough and concerned voice suddenly speaks up from behind me. I checked the time before I arrived here so I know it's only three AM. I whip my head around toward the front entry way, realizing that all of the lights have been flipped off in this area of the house. In the corner sits a large, emerald green velvet chaise lounge and just beside that rests the flickering flame of the candle I smelled when I opened the door.

My skin erupts in goosebumps, my stomach sinking quickly and at the same time my heart rapidly picks up its pace. "Working. You know this," I reply curtly. My lips pull back just slightly, and I finger the key between my knuckles just a bit tighter.

"You know how badly I worry about you," he replies kindly. His voice is thick like maple syrup, that Southern accent still tainting every word in country boy charm.

"You don't have to worry. I've told you this countless times, I'm completely safe at the club." I finally turn toward him completely, deciphering only the shadowed outline of his tall, wide figure resting in the chair. One leg is kicked up over his other knee, and I can see his hands resting still over his thigh.

"I'm your brother—"

"*Step-brother*," I remind him, the word slipping from my lips on a harsh whisper.

"None the less, I care deeply for you, Skilla." He stands, the old springs of the chair creaking just slightly while his fancy fucking dress shoes click in distinct authority over our hardwood floors. He moves closer, and I instinctually take a step back until my back hits the front door and I'm caught in place.

"I have to be up early," I start, and for a moment, I drop my eyes to the ground in order to watch his feet while he moves. I know what's coming,

and I hate to admit that I'm too weak to stare him in the eyes while he does it. His toes come straight up to my own, the shine of his brown shoes glinting in the candlelight. Navy slacks, a thin dark brown belt cinched in front of his waist, and a collared sky-blue button down which he has rolled up and cuffed over his forearms.

He towers over me, and his left hand lifts directly up to my chin as he urges me to look at him. "Sweet Skilla," he whispers, almost as if he actually cares. His tone still holds a soothing element, one that sounds as if he's genuinely invested in my well-being.

He isn't.

I close my eyes, refusing to look at him. I don't want to see the same face I've spent the last eight years of my life with. Ever since our parents died, he's the one I've had to rely on.

Not that either my mother or her new husband were present figures in our lives. Once my mom met him after my parents' divorce, she was quick to get lost in the rich Southern life before we moved out to New York. Georgia was our home, and my now step-brother, Rowan, was a kind sixteen year old boy who quickly took me under his wing. *Or so I thought.*

I was only thirteen, and after spending most of my life in a trailer park with my mom, Rowan and his father, Daniel, seemed like the heroes we were hoping for.

But it didn't take long for the climate to change once we were all nestled tightly under one roof. My bedroom was placed next to Rowan's, Mom and Daniel's room on the other side of the house. No matter what I'd say, mother wouldn't listen. We were finally rich, living in a highly esteemed home with a reputable man and his popular son.

Money and status were attributes we had never experienced before and they were ones my mother was unwilling to give up.

No matter what I sacrificed for us to keep it.

After their sudden death four years ago, I stayed with Rowan in the house he inherited from his father under the guise that he could still use me in the ways he'd been before. So, I pay my rent in his bedroom and then I feel anything I want to with the girls at the club. This is why the attention I received from Ruby and K meant so much to me.

It was familiar. At least with them I got off, and I actually wanted to be there. I needed to lose the control I so desperately held on to when I was home with Rowan.

Fuck childhood trauma, right? Neglectful parents and abusive step-siblings. My mind is one dark mess of forbidden desires and misplaced affection.

His fingers suddenly tighten around my jaw, but his thumb continues gliding across my soft skin in gentle patterns. That's his move, harsh, but sweet. Loving and disrespectful all at the same time.

"How much money did you make tonight?" he asks quietly, dropping his lips to my ear as his hot breath blows across my cheek. More goosebumps, and I visibly shiver in front of him while he cages me in.

"Not enough." I lie, because I don't want him taking anything else from me. He has more than enough, and at least while I'm here, I can save and stash until I can afford buying a place on my own.

He pulls away just slightly, enough to where I can see the evil glint in his hazel eyes while he watches me. His head tilts to the side, his long blonde hair shadowing one side of his perfectly symmetrical face. A sharp jawline surrounds his rosy lips, and I can tell he's smirking just slightly before glancing down to the front of his pants.

Rolling his hips forward, his already hard cock brushes against my lower stomach. Nausea pulses in my gut and expands through my chest. Fucking sick. I'm as gay as ever and the idea of his dick makes me want to vomit. "Tell me how you'll pay for your room in this household then, my sister."

Sister. He uses the term so endearingly...it's foul.

The saddest part is how I know what he's asking for. He doesn't want me to simply give it to him, he gets off on hearing me say it. In detail. Every fucking time.

"Rowan, I'm tired," I try again to push him away, but I have to be careful, if I push too hard, he fights harder and I don't want to deal with that tonight on top of this.

"I am not," he replies, his tone turning flat and vacant. He rolls forward again, this time gripping my wrist tightly and yanking my hand down to rest over the crotch of his pants. "See? Tell me sister, how can you help me?" His breathing becomes heavy as he steps closer to me, his free hand running along the back of my neck as he pulls me against him. "I want to hear you, girl."

In a quick instant, I attempt one escape by shoving my fist forward and into his ribs. My keys are layered between my knuckles, and I dig as

deeply as I can while he stumbles back. His hand flies over his side, a sharp groan spilling from his lips. “You fucking cunt,” he bites out, but I’m already turning on my heels and racing up the staircase.

He’s tall, and before I make it even four steps up, his long fingers are wrapping tightly around my ankle. Yanking me down, my chin hits the edge of the fucking stair and an intense searing of pain sparks along my jaw. My fingers claw forward, struggling to pull me up while I scramble to bring my foot out of his hold and crack is across his face.

“This is how you want it tonight? Rough?” He spits, his teeth grinding together while his body shifts over my back. “Fucking slut. You like it this way, don’t you? Need your big brother to teach you a lesson.”

Jesus fuck, he’s vile and a strangled cry escapes my lips while I manage a couple more stairs under his hold. His fingers slip into the back of my panties, and he begins yanking them down my thighs while I fight against his hold. At the same time, his other hand slides into the strands of my hair, ripping my head back and smashing it forward against the staircase a second time.

Metallic tinges flood my mouth and I can feel the heat of blood and the sting of split skin rush along my face. I cry out, frantically brushing my fingertips over my jaw until the eruption of pain indicates where I’ve been injured. “Fuck, fuck, fuck,” I mutter, noticing how my lip is already swelling against my teeth and tongue.

In a sheer moment of luck, my foot slips free of his hold and I gain the momentum I need to throw it back against his jaw. I watch as his head whips back and I use that moment to race forward, burying the pain under my adrenaline. In a desperate move, I run straight for my bedroom, throwing the door open and slamming it shut behind me. Rowan is quick though, and his fists are beating against it while his hand incessantly pulls at the knob. I know he’ll break through...he always does. But this buys me a bit of time to figure out any potential way of escape.

I’m tempted to make a run for my window, but I’d drop two floors and if he made it outside, I don’t know if I’d be able to run away quick enough. I truly didn’t intend on taking it this far tonight, and the thrill in his tone as he screams in both anger and lust have my stomach rolling in disgust.

Suddenly though, he goes still. Complete and total silence on the other side of the door. One beat. Two.

“Wait until I finally get my hands on you tonight, girl. You’ve made me bleed. Do you know what that means, sweet sister?” He finally speaks and his tone is eerily quiet. His words slither through lips like a snake ready for attack. It’s the calm in his voice that scares me most and my skin is rippling in goosebumps as fear breaks through my blood.

My chest is heaving with rapid breaths but I dare not speak. I don’t utter a single word in response to what he’s asking. Instead, I squeeze my eyes shut while my hands splay flat against the door at my back. I’m using all of my strength to lean against it entirely, and I’m thankful for exactly that in the next moment.

Because instantly, his fists pound against the door with more strength than I think I’ve ever seen him use. I feel the wood splinter at my back, and that terrifying realization paralyzes me momentarily. For fuck sake, he’s breaking the damn door down and my mind spirals in fear of what this means for me. What this means for my body.

I worry this will be the worst I’ve ever taken from him tonight.

“Stop, Rowan!” I shout, his loud and eager voice laughing on the other side of the door. He’s fucking insane, and I can only imagine that this kind of hunt is exactly what he’s looking for. “Please!” My heartbeat is racing uncontrollably, my breath coming short in my lungs while I move into a panic. The door is breaking apart with each blow of his fist and I can only visualize the blood that must be splattering the white paint now.

But in the next moment, everything goes silent. A sound that both alarms and relieves me.

I hear nothing. No sound of his breath, no beating fists, no horrid words and frightening threats. My eyes remain closed out of fear, and it takes several minutes of trusted silence for me to finally pry them open and slowly turn around.

I was right. Blood is everywhere, coating the sharp jagged spears of wood still adorning the door. I lean forward, peeking through the obvious hole he’s destroyed in the middle of it.

That’s when a wave of confusion rolls through me. I notice his long legs and bloodied fists lying flat on the ground. Cautiously reaching for the doorknob, I pull it open and find him completely passed out on the ground at my feet.

“What the—” I start, but I’m quickly cut off as my body flies back and lithe fingers wrap tightly around my throat. I’m twisted around in an

instant, my chest being shoved against the wall of my room as a tall, powerful figure stands at my back. Their hold tightens even more, forcing my head back and against their chest while nails cut into my skin.

My heart pounds, a distinct draw in my blood suddenly sparking alive again. But there's no way...it's impossible.

"It's a good thing you've got that fight you've just shown me, Kitten."



CHAPTER FOUR

NA'AMAH

Her body rolls against mine, and fuck, I smell the fear in her blood. The arousal on her skin. I can hear the hummingbird beat of her heart as it pounds under those brittle, fragile bones. *Mortal.*

She'll die in a few decades; old age and a weary body will claim her if something else doesn't do it earlier—*like the Bite.*

Or me.

I lean forward, dragging my nose up the narrow column of her soft neck. Her sweet skin practically sings, and I fight the urge to drop my fangs and sink them inside her.

Her breath hitches in her throat, and I hear the way her heart skips a sudden beat and shifts into an irregular pattern. “Jesus, a fucking heart murmur? Really?” My fingers slide over her jaw while I twist her head back to look at me. I don't pay attention to the way her gaze lingers on my lips. Instead, I examine the marks on her jawline and chin, the bruising already flowering her left cheek and running under her eye. Her pathetic step-brother left a few solid marks on her skin and strangely, I already want to kill him for it.

For no other reason than the simple fact that she will soon belong to us. The Four Queens. As one of Lilith's brides, she'll be untouchable by both the supernatural and mortal realms.

“How did you know I have a heart murmur?” she asks, her silky sweet voice offering me the tiniest Southern twang.

It's sexy. I won't lie, and has me aching to get her into my quarters so I can begin her training sessions immediately.

“I can hear it,” I reply, my voice is quiet and dismissive while I turn her around to face me. She takes the opportunity to attempt pulling out of my hold and I shove her back against the wall just as quickly. My forearm comes to rest against her throat and I shift it up in order to force her head steady and her gaze into my own. “You’re pathetic. Do you know that?” I ask, tilting my head to the side while my voice drops a bit lower.

Her eyes narrow on me, and I feel her body tense as it presses against my own. Her tits heave with each breath, and I can feel her energy shift incrementally in several different directions while I hold her here.

Her mind is running with countless thoughts. I can tell. I can’t read her head like Aggie can, but I’m incredibly perceptive and I can tell when someone is both angry and turned on.

That’s my entire job, honestly. Break these girls down into submissives while training them to take the Bite in success. I read body cues, I listen to breathing patterns, and I taste certain emotions and anticipations in their blood. My skill set is reliant memories as well, seeing as water contains memory, and water makes up ninety-two percent of blood.

It’s amazing what blood will tell you. Far more than a simple thought could. She could tell me she isn’t enjoying this all she wants, that she seeks out independence and power rather than shallow validation from strangers and strippers. But that simply isn’t true. Instead, I can feel the honesty behind those lies, taste them on her skin and hear the unspoken words while I savor her blood.

The incessant need she has to feel accepted. The mediocre love she welcomes in her own desperate cry for affection. It’s all there, in every cell her blood and sweat has to offer me. Her emotions, her memories... not her words. That’s where I find her truth.

“Who the fuck do you think you are? Coming to my home like this? Saying those things to me? Fuck you.” Suddenly, her eyes take a darker turn, her voice turning thick with anger and frustration. Her body remains tense, and it’s because I’m already so accustomed to situations like this I can see how much of a facade her words are.

She does this often. It looks comfortable, familiar on her tone and spoken on those heavy lips.

My eyes catch the movement, focusing on the way her tongue slips out and coats her plump bottom lip while she speaks. For a moment, I forget that she’s angry, completely space that she’s attempting some sort of

verbal fight against me right now. Because fuck, those lips working overtime have me doing a double take.

Eyes shift back up, and then down. Back up a second time, until I finally lift my thumb and press it down on the center of that bottom lip.

That stops her talking and her head reels back while she attempts dropping her gaze and watching the movement. She's quiet though, and distracted. So, I use the brief interlude to regain my own focus and keep her pinned to the wall. Reaching behind myself, I slip my hand into my back pocket, quickly tugging a black cloth bag free and hiding it at my back.

I lean forward, intentionally dragging my thumb down while I pull on her lip. She gasps, and the sweet sound is a flash of electricity in my blood while I watch her.

Cautiously, something shifts inside of me. An incredibly small gesture, one that's weak and nearly escapes without notice. It's a single flare of something unrecognizable, but gone just as quickly when I refocus my attention.

That was strange.

My lips near hers and I'm aching to brush against them, take the smallest claim of tasting her skin already. But I can't. Lilith will want the first taste before I take over, confirming their compatibility in ways she'll never understand just yet. Skilla, I mean, and it's understandable. It's always a chore, having to explain our race to the humans who are afraid of anything even remotely different than they are.

They choose to stay ignorant, refusing to grow in the wake of staying naive and comfortable. I can't comprehend it. But you can't force growth onto anyone. You can't force evolution. You simply adapt, defend and protect yourself and others against the darkness humanity can hold.

As I feel her breath on my lips, I shift incrementally closer. Letting my free hand lift up from her waist and drag my knuckles across her cheek. I slip one finger through a fallen lock of her hair, wrapping it around until I can tuck it back behind her ear.

Sweet, stupid, little girl. She'll be easy to break; she's practically there already. But keeping her alive and strong enough for Lilith will be the true challenge.

I let her stay distracted, it's exactly what I need, and while she watches my movement and her gaze falls to my nearing lips, I lift the bag and yank

it down over her head and cinch it around her throat.

She thrashes immediately, throwing her hands out and letting her nails scrape into my skin. It's absolutely useless however, and I'm quick to pin her hands at her sides and press my bared teeth against her right ear while I move us to her window. "Stay quiet, don't cry, and do as I fucking say. This will be so much worse for you if you decide to break my simple rules. Do you understand?" I await her response, halting our movements until I've got her surrender.

"Fuck. Off," she finally snaps back, throwing her head forward and smashing it across my own.

Fuck. But it's not me who's bleeding. I can smell the fresh cut the instant she retracts and stumbles in pain. She attempts to lift her hands and rubs her own forehead, but I don't release her. She can deal with the consequences of her own actions.

It's her blood that's really getting to me though. I'm hungry, even after feeding at the mansion before coming here. I wouldn't have thought so prior to scenting her blood, but hell, now? My stomach twists in pains of starvation and I'm slightly confused at the effect she's having on me. I don't find attachment in anyone. Even their blood doesn't draw much more than sweet satisfaction of hunger and thirst from me.

That's it.

So, why is my hand twitching to pull off the bag and examine the injury myself, and then slip my tongue along her blood and savor it completely.

A quiet, peculiar pull inside me begs to be closer to her. It's one I can't let myself focus on or try to decipher—no. I refuse to give this strange need any more attention.

"Lilith needs you," I reply instead, refusing to take a single second to check on her and her well-being. I'm offering useless information to her now though. She has no idea the importance she holds.

Absolutely not.

"I don't give a fuck who needs me. How about what I need? Huh? Are you going to answer my questions?" She begins rambling, and I easily ignore her rant while I lift her by the waist and throw her over my fucking shoulder like a child. She cries out at the sudden movement, her fingers clinging to my crop top at my back while her legs dangle in front of my

face. “Naamie!” she shouts, her tone frantic and unsure while she scrambles to get down.

“Don’t call me that.” I reply, climbing out of the window myself while locking my hold around Skilla’s waist.

“Then what do I call you?” she asks, and I can tell she’s forcing steady breaths in and out of her lungs while I begin crouching down and mentally calculating my descent. She’s flooded with emotions right now, and irritated at my lack of flexibility in this conversation. I’m surprised at the way she blocks it out though. It’s almost as if there’s a storm growing inside of her, but it’s stifled and numbed by the walls she’s effectively surrounded it with. As if I can feel her, wild and chaotic and free, but quickly tamped out by whatever experiences have imprisoned her.

“Well for starters, only my sisters call me Naamie.” I look down, estimating a nearly forty-five foot fall. “You can call me Alca.” As soon as I offer her the title, I jump. We fall through the air, my frame keeping us stable while we land on the ground below and I drop with ease. Skilla is terrified, and I can still feel her fingers biting into my skin after clinging to me.

I drop her on the ground, twisting her in my hold but leaving the bag over her face so she can’t see where we are going. “What the fuck is happening? Where are you taking me?” She stutters, her words coming out in choppy bits while panic begins working through her body. Her head is whipping back and forth, as if she can see through the dark covering over her eyes.

Placing my hand on the back of her neck, I step up against her back, using my knee to kick her legs forward and force her to walk. “All of your questions will be answered shortly.” I reply simply, moving us out toward the empty field that resides across the street from the house she lives in. It looks like a plot of land for upcoming home builds, but nothing has started in it yet, and it’ll give us enough room to shift into the Underworld.

“Or you could answer me now,” she bites back, suddenly halting her steps while we stand in the center of the road. I’m anything but patient, so I offer her a solid kick in the back of her legs to push her forward. But she doesn’t respond, and instead turns around with flying fists as she manages to strike my face.

I launch forward immediately, anger and frustration rolling through my blood. Damn, I underestimated this girl’s fucking fight, “Who the fuck do

you think *you* are? As if you have any say, any ability to escape, to hurt me, to what...? Kill me?" I scoff, wrapping my fingers tightly around her throat without taking off the blindfold. I stalk her backwards, and with every large step I take, she stumbles in response. She's completely reliant on my ability to keep her safe right now. She doesn't know where we're going, doesn't know if there's something she could run into, and has zero understanding of whether she will survive this.

"Yeah—yes. If I had to, I could." Her voice is hesitant, and I can tell she doesn't believe the words she's speaking. It's evident in her stuttered verbiage and quiet voice.

I laugh, throwing my head back while I finally bring us to the center of the field. I stop our movements and she yanks away, trying to rip her arms free of my hold when I drag her back against my chest. We're heaving together, heated breaths warring between us on stifled grunts and groans of irritation and strain.

"You think you can hurt me? In the fucking slightest?" I whisper quietly, finally forcing her slender frame still while I press my fingers tightly into her upper arms. I hold her against me, my knee nestled tightly between her thighs while I dip my lips close to her ear. "Have you ever done that before? Hurt someone, I mean." One of my hands relaxes as I lift my fingers and begin sliding them across her skin. Over her shoulder, up the side of her neck, back down along her collarbone.

She doesn't answer me.

"I didn't think so, sweet kitty." I drag my lips over her ear, enunciating each word while my fingers move across her skin with a fragile touch. Playing with my projects is my favorite pastime. "You're weak. Even the fight you're putting up now is nothing compared to my other girls."

I push her deeper into the field ahead of us, she sloppily crunches through the overgrown grass and dust under her bare feet. She'll bleed, and I hear her cry out when she steps on a sharp rock as we move. So, I push her again, and she falls back on her ass before I'm grabbing her by her throat and yanking her up again. "Move."

"Other girls?" she asks, and for the first time, I hear genuine terror in her voice. Hell, even while her brother was breaking through that fucking door, she didn't sound this afraid.

"Other girls. Plenty of them. Used for short periods of time before they're worthless." I tilt my head as I speak, and observe every heated

breath, every movement of her hands, her shifting shoulders, all of it. Fear continues building in her stomach, and I glance behind her before realizing we're almost to the center of the field.

"Used for what?" she asks frantically, her voice raising an octave while her hands splay out at her sides as if she's feeling for something around her.

"Food."

Easy. Straight to the point. Honest.

She halts mid-step, frozen in place as soon as I speak the word. "Wha —"

Frustration snaps inside of me at her inability to listen. I launch forward and wrap my fingers through her hair, yanking her toward me and shifting her around while I push her forward. I keep her head pinned back against my chest, and I can tell her lips have fallen open on a whimper while I shove her forward. I can hear the heavy breaths while she struggles to breathe against the fabric.

I drop down to her ear again, grinding out the truth I'm sure she's both desperate and terrified to hear. "You heard me. The girls are food, shredded apart and devoured until there's nothing left. Skin and bones, empty lungs of consumed hopes and dreams. They are nothing. Always were, always will be." I laugh in a low tone against her ear. "And you're one of the lucky chosen."

She bucks forward, attempting to rip out of my hold and escape. My fingers remain on her, my tight hold cinching down even harder with every failed attempt she makes. "Get the fuck off of me," she stammers, clear panic in her voice and evident on her slick skin. "Let me go!" She screams this time and kicks her leg back while surprisingly making contact with my knee. It catches me off guard, and my hold on her falters for a brief second. But it's enough for her to pull free, and suddenly she's on the ground on her hand and knees rushing away from me.

I dive toward her, and my hand flies to the back of her head as I shove it into the dirt. I rip off the bag, a fiery anger burning along my skin at the fact that she fucking hit me. I'll make her pay for this, and the sudden spark of temptation lights along my skin at the ways I can make her bleed.

Leaning over her, I bring my eyes directly into her line of sight. Her mouth is bloody, her lips split, and dirt cakes her skin while she breathes

into the ground. She's struggling, but I straddle her ass and force her face against the gritty rocks and sticks below us.

"You, Skilla, are nothing." I spit the words against her skin, marring those flushed cheeks and exhausted eyes. "Do you understand me?"

She simply watches me in the ragged silence of her wheezing breaths and quickly diminishing strength. She doesn't respond and she'll soon learn that isn't the correct reaction to this.

"I said, do you understand?" I repeat myself, but I'll only do it once. She'll learn this rather fast as well.

Again, nothing.

I roughly shift my leg forward and up between her thighs. My fingers tighten in the coils of her hair as I rip her head back and force my fingers into her mouth. Pushing her jaw down, I slide them back until she gags and coughs while I pull out. "Do you fucking understand me?" I say again, gripping her jaw tightly while I inch my face closer to hers.

She nods immediately, tears slipping free of her eyes and spilling down her cheeks.

"Tell me what you are," I demand, pushing her to repeat my words while I watch her unravel.

"No," she says immediately, and while I can see the fight in her eyes, I know it's fading as well.

This will be easy.

My fingers slide around her throat while I shift behind her, pulling her against my chest while I speak in a whisper. "Tell me no again, and I promise you will pay for this once we get to the Underworld."

She pauses before responding, I'm sure both wanting to refuse and processing the term I referenced regarding home. She doesn't even know what we are, let alone where we come from.

"No," she finally bites out, and truthfully, it sends an electric current whipping through my blood in excitement. I'm both livid and thrilled by the fight she's giving me. She'll be quick to break, but at least I'll have a little fun before she does.

I laugh, slowly and quietly before releasing her throat and placing my hand on the ground beside her face. "*Salman.*" Whispering the word for *home* in our celestial language, Enochian, I focus completely on where we are going. I can feel the magic pulling inside of me, gathering and building into a spark that will light our departure from this world and into the next.

There's another entrance into the Underworld, through a forest far off from here, but Lucifer has it designed in ways that would drive men mad if they attempt entry. It keeps our world safe, and thankfully we have our own methods of leaving and entering when necessary.

Skilla suddenly begins writhing beneath me, struggling to escape as the ground practically breathes below us.

I know what's coming, and it's in that next instant we're swallowed up by the earth and descend into Hell.

CHAPTER FIVE

Skilla

What the hell is happening to me? My mind is racing with a thousand thoughts, struggling to process and keep up before the next strike hits. How does one make sense of this? How am I supposed to understand and defend or protect myself when every other sentence is a new revelation?

None of this makes sense. None of it. And the only person I feel explicitly drawn to is the one who wants me fucking dead. I traded one monster for another, my step-brother for an evil entity.

And to think I was trying to figure out how to escape the club earlier. There's no way I'm getting out of this...*the Underworld*...without someone's assistance.

In a single moment of sheer confusion at Na'amah's spoken word, the ground below opens wide to swallow us completely. I'm on my stomach, with her at my back and it feels as though we're falling freely. My body instantly reacts by attempting to shrink back and into Na'amah. Her arms wrap tightly around my waist as she pulls me against her as well.

She's cold. Frozen, actually, against my skin and yet I hate myself for finding comfort in her nearness. Everything is black, and for a moment, I wish I could glance back into her eyes for some kind of bright light in this darkness.

What a fucking joke.

She's anything but light, and those little alarms in my mind continuously remind me that I have to fight and escape or I will die here.

I will die here.

She said so herself, when she mentioned her other girls. What did she say again? That they're used for fucking food? Jesus fucking Christ. My head swims, and before I realize it we've hit the ground and Na'amah has somehow landed us on our feet. That's the moment I realize I'm not even touching the ground, until Na'amah drops me a few inches and I can finally stand on my own.

But I fall, immediately. A wash of dizziness and nausea roll through me all at once. Slamming my eyes closed, I rub my fingers over my skin, feeling the texture of my previous fight with Rowan and Na'amah's blending together.

What the fuck has the last twelve hours of my life been.

"Get up," she snaps behind me, and I wish I had a second to collect myself before she yanks me up off the floor and shoves me forward. I scramble to open my eyes and pay attention. I'm desperately looking for anything, another person, a doorway, any familiar sign as to where I could actually be.

I'd say the Underworld doesn't exist, but the fact that I just fell through the fucking dirt outside my home tells me otherwise. Those thoughts alone paralyze me, so I forcibly shove them down and attempt suppressing the intoxicating fear that's made home under my skin. She's a resident that's become all too familiar since the club last night.

What I do notice, however, are the black walls and floors surrounding me. Everything is grand and granite, impeccably designed in some architectural display of renaissance. Large columns, intricate pediments and archways span the grand hall we're currently moving through.

I'm caught off guard by how beautiful it truly is. But I refuse to acknowledge that for long, and the heavy footfalls of Na'amah behind me become the staple consistency I rely on to keep me grounded. Because if I don't make it out of here, at least I'll die at the hands of someone who's already marked my body in her toxicity. It'll be familiar, and I'll make sure she stares into my eyes before taking my fucking life.

I'll take her with me, find whatever her weakness is, so when the time comes I'm fucking prepared.

Suddenly, a set of magnificent, white doors come into view. They're huge, standing at least twenty feet above my head. Large decorative vines of black and gold dance across them in beautifully intricate patterns. They truly capture my attention, and my pace slows while my head tilts to the

right as I make sense of them. “They almost look like—” I begin quietly, but Na’amah immediately pushes me forward and pulls my attention away from the doorway.

“Quiet. Do not speak unless spoken to, do not fight, and do not touch a single thing. Do you understand me?” she demands at my back, her tone turning detached and colder than usual. When it was the two of us before, she felt a bit raw, like I had the space to dig a little deeper if I could manage to.

Here? She’s completely shut off. I wouldn’t have even distinguished the difference if not for this moment right now.

“Yes,” I reply, but in the next moment she’s hovering over my back, her fingers sliding slowly over my hip and lower stomach as she pulls me back against her. I gasp, my breath caught in my throat at how strangely gentle it feels.

“Do not speak. Nod. That is your only option. I will direct you further if necessary once you face Lilith.” She whispers the words in my ear, her soft lips brushing against me and sending goosebumps springing across my shoulders.

I want to refuse, tell her to fuck right off and let me go again. But my body is sore, my mind is tired, and the sheer fear that lives rent-free inside of me is now controlling my every decision.

I’m too exhausted to fight back at the moment and I know I’ll need to rest before I can successfully save myself from whatever the fuck this is.

Save myself. The two words trigger some sort of instant emotional response in my stomach. It feels like a bird, suddenly flapping freely in a space it was previously caged within. I can’t explain it entirely, but I resonate with it, and while my body moves in terror and uncertainty, the tiniest anchor of something new and strong sparks in my chest.

I tuck that away, clinging to the feeling. I’ll need that reminder moving forward.

I nod, finally, just as we approach the doors in front of us. They are absolutely magical. I swear the gold practically moves along the detailed wisps and feathers etched into the frame.

I want to ask what they are, because I’m so curious to know why—

Na’amah quickly slides her thumb just under my jaw, stepping up to my side and turning so that she’s looking down on me. I watch her as she lifts it and slips it between her lips, her long, slick tongue sliding across

the tip as if she's tasting me on her flesh. My eyebrows drop in confusion, and yet my heart rate picks up just slightly as my eyes focus on her movements.

"Wings," she replies flatly. The exact answer to my thoughts just a moment ago. That's what I imagined they were, but I couldn't be sure and now I'm absolutely baffled at the notion that she could have known what I was thinking.

"How did you—" I start, but Na'amah is quick to step in front and cut me off. She lifts her hand, her long slender fingers splayed out as she presses it against a burst of black and gold spires. It looks as though that's where the handle should be for the door, and I suddenly realize in a way, it's exactly what this is.

Na'amah drops her head and whispers something I don't understand. It sounds like the same language she spoke before when she brought us here. My mind runs through the different languages I've heard spoken around me, the few classes I've taken in high school but nothing triggers a familiarity.

But my thoughts are quickly drawn toward the doors again when something changes. It begins small, and my eyes follow the tiny wisps as they pull and unravel across the frame of the door. I gasp, confused and suddenly frightened at what I'm watching. How could this be possible? Stumbling back, my eyes frantically bounce around the entire space as the swirls shift around the large doorway. It's as if the door itself is alive, unlocking completely before finally parting for our entry.

Na'amah hears my faltered steps backwards and immediately whips her head toward me, a single hand darts forward and grips my wrist, yanking me in front of her until she's nestled tightly behind me again. Nothing in her face shows a glimpse of emotion, no break in that steely, frozen demeanor she so easily maintains.

Does she feel anything? I absently wonder, and the thought feels silly until I remind myself much crazier things have happened in the last twelve hours.

I'm pushed forward again, the knife she must have holstered this entire time now lays strongly against my back in a continuous reminder that she can so easily take my life. My eyes stray to the left and the right as I observe where we entered, and if I thought the grand space of the hall before this was magical—this room is something else entirely.

Large velvet tapestries line the walls in stunning, vibrant colors. Purple, blue, black, and green. They cascade over the floor and spill through the center of the room across the black granite below us. Ahead of me rests four magnificent thrones.

Thrones. Jesus fuck, I never thought I'd use that word to describe something I was witnessing in reality and another wave of disbelief and confusion threatens to break through once again. I force the feeling away though, because I know once it hits, I'll be overcome in a complete and total mental fucking break down.

Just get through the next few minutes. Minutes at a time, that's what I'm telling myself. And I'll keep repeating that mantra in my mind until I can finally escape, or take Na'amah down with me when I go.

Within those thrones, sits three women. One of which I recognize immediately—Aggie. Her wild purple hair bounces around her shoulders and the smile on her face is both manic and predatory. Her throne is the most colorful out of the four, sprinkled in beautiful gemstones and crystals that frame her lithe figure perfectly.

Beside her sits a woman I've never seen before. She's stunning, and regal in a way none of the others hold. She seems peaceful, and yet her gaze pierces through me in subtle flames I can hardly explain. It's painful, whatever it is, and not a single ounce of her feels welcoming to me. Her lips are pressed into a tight line, and I don't miss the way her eyes snap up to Na'amah at my back. *They don't warm for her either.*

In between them, sits the woman I was only in the presence of briefly at the club. I never saw her face, but her energy now is what I'm most familiar with. I can feel it, slithering around her in chaos and discomfort. Her appearance is unlike anything I've ever experienced, pale skin and long, raven black hair. Her lips are a pale, diminished tone against her flesh. I can tell from looking at her that something is wrong. But whatever condition she's facing does nothing to distract from her beauty.

She's otherworldly. Imperial. Queenly.

"Lilith." Na'amah's voice blows out across the soft skin at the nape of my neck. My heart rate peaks, fluttering uncontrollably until she places her hand in the same spot, as if she could visibly see the goosebumps breaking out over my skin. Her tone remains that cold, detached blast of ice in the large space and I stand frozen in between all of them.

I feel weak, in the midst of this apparent strength. I'm the prey, and these predators are everything I could ever imagine being terrified of. I've faced countless obstacles in my life, clearly with my step-brother and also at the club. I've heard the stories of The Nation and what Aura and Calypso experienced with Dom. Thankfully, it never went that far with me, as in Dom never brought me to The Nation or attempted recruiting me.

But I did suffer his nights in room five. I did experience that dark and vile part of him, but it was so similar to Rowan's stolen moments I was able to easily shut myself off from the interactions.

Besides, as much as I hated to admit it, it felt familiar. And there is comfort in familiarity.

"Do you never listen, little sister?" Lilith finally speaks, and I notice the way her already pale fingers tighten around the arms of her throne. She looks tired, but underneath the exhaustion lies a clear fiery anger burning within.

My eyes snap to the left in an instant, just as the high-pitched sound of Aggie's piercing laughter billows through the air. It echoes off the walls and I instinctually flinch away at the loud sound as it catches me off guard. Na'amah tenses at my back, I feel her step close but I also hear the quiet release of a sigh as she listens to the maniacal laughter of her sister.

"Praise the Lord, the prodigal son has returned once again with another devout member of the cause." Aggie stands, lifting her hands wide and high in the air. She suddenly brings them together in what I believe is mock prayer, bending at her hips and straightening back up with a smile spread wide across her face.

"Why, please, tell me why you so willingly entertain humanity's false interpretation of creation? It's embarrassing, really." This time, the voice belongs to the woman at Lilith's right, she rolls her eyes back and presses her fingers to her temples in what seems to be irritation.

Aggie sits back down with a heavy thump, throwing one leg over the other as that arrogant smile slips back across her face again. "Eh, call it a church kink. I can't help it." Her fingers clasp at the center of her chest, her head falling to the left on a slight tilt as her eyes bore into my own. "Praise be, sister. Praise be."

"Enough!" Lilith shouts, her voice screeching through the air like a burning blade searing over my bones. I feel it everywhere, and my body responds by throwing myself back against Na'amah uncontrollably. She

pushes me forward again though, refusing to let me near her. She doesn't give a shit either way of my survival, and it's a subtle reminder that I am here entirely on my own.

Lilith stands, slowly, but without a single shred of weakness in her movements. I can tell something is desperately wrong with her, but I also have a feeling she would never let anyone close enough to see that. Stepping down, her eyes don't fall to me once, but remain locked on Na'amah as she inches us closer.

There is a power breathing between them, a tension that's thick and heavy in both anger and misery. It's dark, and sits like a weight around all of us. I so badly wish I understood what was happening, but I take the momentary distraction of tension to glance around the room for any other doorways or means of escape.

"I always listen, sister. That is why I've come, that is the only reason I've brought her here." Na'amah's voice remains strong and persistent. She presses her hand to the small of my back, eliciting a wash of resentment rolling through me at the simple touch. "You need her. As much as you don't want to admit it, as much as I don't want to. Believe me, I'd much rather have left her to die where I found her tonight. But we need everything we can get ahold of for you, and I'm willing to sacrifice her life on your behalf."

What the fuck.

"Are you kidd—" I mutter, but my mouth seals shut in the next second when the only unknown woman looks my way. I don't know what she's done, I don't understand it, but I physically cannot open my mouth in any way. My mind races, and I panic at the confusing war working through me. Where the fuck am I? Who are these people? Why can I not speak, and defend myself, and control these feelings rushing through me?

"Silence, human," she speaks flatly, completely dismissing my presence as she turns her attention back to Lilith and Na'amah. "She's right. We do need her."

"And what if we kill her? Huh? What do you do then? Do not pretend like a death belonging to one of your submissives means nothing to you. I know that is not the case," Lilith explains, again, refusing to meet my gaze and only speaking to my captor. I can hardly believe every word I'm hearing. I don't understand anything that has happened tonight thus far, but I feel like the more I try to make sense of it, the crazier I am.

“I could train her,” Aggie speaks, and for the first time, I’m actually hopeful this might be the outcome. Whatever I’m training for, there’s something sweet and a bit magical about Aggie. Like a wild herd of elk running through her, life flows in her veins and magic sings in her blood.

She’s the warmest of them all, but I’m not naive enough not to realize that she could have a completely different side I’ve never seen before. Who knows what goes on behind her closed doors, there is something awfully secretive about her...and I’m not sure I want to understand what that is just yet.

She jumps up and hurries down the steps, eagerly moving toward me with hands outstretched when an arm suddenly snakes around my waist and tightens painfully. I’m yanked backwards and thrown behind Na’amah, and that’s the moment I realize she’s lunging toward Aggie with a strangled hiss escaping her throat.

Aggie stumbles back, that smile stretching even wider while her eyebrows dip in the slightest bout of confusion. Na’amah quickly steps back, cutting off her threatening tone and physically shaking her head in front of me. “Well, well well—” Aggie whispers, and I can barely hear it before she hastily goes quiet when Na’amah snaps her head in that direction.

“I’m fucking tired, okay? And hungry. I apologize.” She turns away from Aggie and moves toward Lilith, slowly pressing her hands against her shoulders and bringing her forehead to rest against her sisters. It’s the kindest moment I’ve seen any of them share, and I use the tender exchange to glance over my shoulder for any means of escape. “A single taste, okay? Tell me if she’s compatible. If she is, I’ll work with her. Take it slow, train her well. She’ll take the Bite, I’m sure of it.”

The Bite.

What the actual hell is the goddamn Bite? Fear slithers against my skin and stirs low in my belly. My intuition, that inner voice is scraping along my blood in reminders that this is where my life will end. This mansion, this fucking nightmare, this insane Wonderland of Hell I’ve happened to find myself in. Because that’s the truth, is it not? I have no idea where I am. I can only make assumptions, guesses at how I fell through the fucking earth and found myself locked in a room with powerful creatures drawing unexplainable emotions from me.

I don't fucking understand. How did I find myself at my club only a few hours ago and now in what feels like the pit of the actual fucking earth.

My eyes scan the wide space, narrowing in on two small doorways on opposite ends of the room. I've got no idea where either one leads, but if I quietly step away and—

"If you think for a single second, you can simply run away little kitty," Aggie laughs against my ear in a tone that's arrogant and starved. "You will spend the rest of the week in far more pain than you could even imagine." Her hands quickly grip my wrists as she pulls me against her, dragging me across the floor of the room until I'm standing up against Na'amah and Lilith once again.

My heart sinks, that heavy feeling in my stomach twisting into a stab of disappointment and surrender. *Mother fucker*, with every passing moment comes another notch against my hope for freedom.

Na'amah turns to look at me, her icy eyes glazing over in vacancy. It's as if she isn't even here, but her physical form remains near. Her fingers immediately launch forward and wrap around the nape of my neck, sliding into the back of my already tangled and distraught strands of hair. She tightens her hold, twisting me around and in front of Lilith while Aggie steps away from us.

My eyes shift her direction, the pain at my scalp cementing my head perfectly still as Na'amah holds me. Aggie's smile is brilliant, and I get a vague memory of Cheshire Cat glimpsing my mind. That's exactly what she reminds me of—crazy and yet all knowing. Arrogant and with a reason to be. Her fingers are laced in front of her waist as she rolls back on her heels before swaying forward again. Her bright eyes bounce around all of us and I can see how eager she is to observe whatever is going to happen next.

When I move my focus back to Lilith, I find her eyes watching me intently. Her gaze is the most toxic, the most powerful out of the four, even while her body seems weak and frail at the moment. I know this isn't her usual demeanor. I can tell she's the one in charge here. In the simple way everyone moves around her, their steps are dictated by her initial passages around the room.

Their eyes follow hers, while she follows no one.

Suddenly, her own frail hands lift in front of me. My eyes hone in on the movement, observing the way her skin seems papery and thin. I watch intensely, wishing I could anticipate whatever is about to take place.

Is this it? The moment when I die? Has my existence here already been deemed worthless and unnecessary?

So much for writing my own fucking story.

Her fingers graze against my cheeks, and the instant chill I feel when she touches me reminds me of Na'amah. Both of them share the same kind of absence in their flesh. No warmth radiates from their forms, I find no comfort in a heated brush of their skin against my own.

Slowly, she trails them along my jaw and my body responds uncontrollably by tilting my head slightly upwards. I give her even more access as she works her way down the slender column of my neck, delicately tracing the line of my vein pulsing in sync with my rapid heartbeat.

Calm down, Skilla. Breathe for fuck sake.

My eyes never leave hers though, because if I can do one thing in the midst of all of this, in the final moments before my death, I'll at least prove to her I'm not afraid of what's coming. Not a single chance in Hell will I let them have the satisfaction of my own fear while they kill me.

The hand nestled tightly at the back of my head forces me to the side, elongating the right edge of my throat while Lilith drifts even closer. Confusion pulls at my features in narrowed brows and wide eyes. Her soft lips come closer, and my chin tilts toward her while Na'amah continues controlling my movements. I can practically feel Lilith's breath against my mouth, and as my lips part subtly, I swear I can almost taste her.

It's sweet. And stagnant. A seductive moment laced in death.

I can't even explain it, but I'm breathing deeply and something tugs inside of me, urging me to take whatever it is she's offering.

Her lips kick up in a slight grin, as if she's getting the exact reaction she wants from me.

Goddamn it. How the fuck do I fight these women off?

She inches closer, and I try to pull back when Na'amah holds me completely steady. A soft whimper escapes my mouth, and I can't help but notice the way Aggie moves forward as soon as I make the sound.

She giggles, and her quiet voice breaks out in a tone that clearly depicts how much she's enjoying every moment of this. "Sister, sister,

keep it together while Lilith takes what's hers." She moves closer to us, coming to stand next to Na'amah and moving out of my line of sight. "She'll never be yours." She whispers the last portion in such a hushed voice I can barely make it out.

But I do...I think. And my mind wanders in what she could possibly mean.

However, my spiraling thoughts are suddenly cut off mid-stream as Lilith's lips crash against my own. Her chest comes flush against mine, her frame towering over me while Na'amah holds me tightly against her.

Both of them surround me, my smaller figure breathing so rapidly against both of them while they consume me. Or what feels like they're doing. I swear, their energy immediately whips through the space, wrapping around us like vines twisting and pulling and straining against my flesh.

My heart is thundering in my chest, my skin pulling tight while my fingers quickly grip Lilith's forearms as she holds my face. Her lips are hungry, moving against my mine as she devours me completely. My head falls back against Na'amah, and I find myself in a space of wanting to breathe, but almost desperate not to.

I want to drown in this, whatever it is. My body is lighting on fire in sparks of lust and hunger for the both of them. Na'amah's hands fall to my waist, her greedy fingers tugging on my body and pulling me against her while her lips fall to my neck. Lilith continues kissing me, her tongue slipping out and crossing the seam of my lips, urging me to open for her.

I do. Easily. Willingly. Gravely.

Every ounce of self-preservation abandons me and I swear I feel Aggie move even closer as well. God, I want this. As more hands fall to my body, moving over my stomach, my chest, brushing along my tits and back over my ass. I can't tell who is who anymore, and I'm tasting Lilith on my tongue in a way that has me whimpering and moaning against her touch.

A hand slides around the front of my throat, fingers dig into my skin until I'm being yanked back and away from everyone around me.

I gasp and my own hands fly up to rip away the hold and clutch my own skin. My lungs are on fire, it feels as though they are collapsing in my chest, grasping at every bit of oxygen they can fucking manage.

"What—What the hell happened?" I try to speak, but the words won't even form on my tongue. I fall to my knees, still clutching my own throat

as I struggle to catch my breath.

Lilith's feet come into view in front of me. Black heavy boots are laced all the way up to her knees. The black silk of her dress cascades around them. Slits decorate the sides of her gown so I can see the intricate tattoos decorating her thighs and disappearing under the hem of fabric.

"She'll do." She responds simply, completely ignoring my question and looking down with a gaze that penetrates my very bones. "Go slow. She can hardly handle this as it is. The Bite will eat her alive if she isn't prepared."

"Eat her alive." Aggie laughs again, followed quickly by a satisfied sigh as she climbs the steps and plops back down in her throne. She throws her legs over one arm and lets her head fall back as she watches me. "I see what you did there. That was clever, sister."

What kind of mad house is this?

Na'amah is abruptly at my back, her hands ripping into my hair and on my shoulders as she drags me back up and turns us around without a word to her sisters. She shoves me forward and I nearly fall to the ground again. But even in the midst of her harsh movements and cold demeanor, I notice the soft touch of her fingers once they make contact, or the way her chest is pressed tightly to my back as she leads me away.

Is this a show, Na'amah? What walls do you have built up in the presence of your sisters?

CHAPTER SIX

NA'AMAH

Logical thinking. That's what I need right now. Ignore feelings, tuck them away, compartmentalize.

Get the job done.

Work.

Work.

Work.

That's what this all is.

So why does it feel differently? Why did that rush of jealousy and possession swell inside of me when I watched my sister with Skilla?

She is nothing. How ironic, truthfully, that I was trying to force her to admit that herself, and now I'm the one reminding my own embarrassingly fragile existence that she truly is worthless.

God, this isn't me. It's easy for me to handle these girls, train them, break them, turn them into exactly what we need for however long we need them. And then it's even easier for me to end them.

So, while I'm urging Skilla ahead of me, toward the small doorway at the front of this room, I'm intentionally forcing myself into a space of detachment. Get this fucking straight, do what needs to be done.

Don't get attached.

"Where are you taking me?" she snaps out, and I ignore her, just as I use my other hand to shove open the large wooden door and allow us entry into one of the stone corridors. I'm tempted to take her directly to the dungeons, I can only assume that's where she'll end up eventually.

But that's not protocol, and every submissive is given their own space and room to decompress and relax in-between feedings.

They build a life here, after being stolen away from their own. I'm not sorry about it, they learn to love it here. They learn to love us. And I feel a room to themselves works in my favor.

A little sweet before the sour. Something to make them believe they're being well taken care of here.

"Wow, you truly live in another little world inside that rage filled head of yours, huh?" Aggie's voice cracks from behind me and I falter, being completely caught off guard as my hand bites into Skilla's waist and she hisses in pain. I release, only slightly though, because I know Aggie's here for her own benefit.

"What are you talking about?" I respond, and we round the corner into a smaller space that houses a set of spiraling stairs.

"You know exactly what I'm talking about. Stop pretending like these girls mean nothing to you. We get it, we get it. You're wildly emotionally unavailable." Aggie jumps ahead of us and leads the way up the staircase as she speaks. Her cheerful and playful tone is laced with condescension.

"Get the fuck out of my head," I bite back, keeping my hold on Skilla's frame as we make our way up the staircase. She remains quiet, but her eyes follow Aggie's swaying hips with each step.

Jealousy and irritation spark in my chest but I ignore it, focusing on the task at hand and telling myself I absolutely have to feed when I'm finished here.

My sister giggles, and once we reach the last step and move into a second hallway, I hear the quiet gasp in Skilla's voice as she observes. This space is far different than where we came from. Ornate carpets and tapestries cover the floor and walls. Beautiful, hand painted portraits of myself and my sisters hang on the walls, and magnificent furniture lines that large room as a common area for the girls when they'd like it.

But several doors are lined across the round room, each one belonging to one of Lilith's harem. These are all submissives I've trained and gotten to know on a deeply personal level. As soon as we enter their area, I immediately notice three of the girls lounging about.

Sera.

Lilac.

Fira.

They turn their heads our direction, and out of immediate respect, tilt their gazes down at my feet.

“Alca,” Lilac speaks out of the three of them, keeping her head down and her hands clasped in front of her waist as she should. The other two have taken the same stance, all three facing me directly as I usher Skilla farther in.

“Oh come on, drop it for now,” Aggie chirps, skipping into the center of the room and then turning to wave her hand over Skilla as if she’s displaying her.

The girls lift their heads only an inch, their brows raising in confusion as they look Aggie’s way. But ultimately, they surrender to the responses they know, the ones they are familiar and comfortable with. They drop their gazes once more and await my command.

“*Ca-g gah*,” I speak strongly. *As you were.*

Lifting my chin, I watch as each of them meet my eyes and relax their shoulders. It’s then that they finally look to Skilla, dropping their gazes and raking back up over her body as they take her in. “This is Skilla. She’s new. You’ll have to show her how life commences here. She’s preparing for the Bite, but we’ve got to take things a bit slower with her. I’ll begin her training in the evening.”

All of them remain silent, but part ways as they open the space for one of the empty rooms in this part of the castle. I wish I could taste each of them in this moment, run my tongue along their skin and get a sense of their thoughts or feelings regarding Skilla. I want them to accept her, honestly, and I’m not sure why that’s initial worry while bringing her here.

“Hello,” Sera offers first, smiling sweetly at Skilla as we walk forward. But she doesn’t respond, and I can feel her body tense under my hands as she watches them. Finally, she nods, keeping her mouth shut but turning her gaze to the right when another door suddenly creaks as it opens.

Brielle. Shit.

I move us forward, refusing to meet her wandering eyes as she watches us. Brielle is my latest submissive, and one that feels emotionally attached to me even now. I have to admit that her training was long and intense, an absolute fire cracker when I found her on the streets of Los Angeles. Submissive now, but only to me and Lilith. She puts up a fight with

everyone else and they all know the attention I give her is...different than the other girls.

There's a final stage in my training, the most important one truthfully. Each of my girls undergo a full week of staying with Lilith. By her side, in her bed, at every meal and function and outing. During this time, they bond with her, they feed her, they fuck and sleep and talk and fuck and feed again.

They grow closer. Lilith takes the lead on their ownership, and their allegiance falls with hers over my own. This time is absolutely crucial to their role in her harem.

It's also in this stage that I get everything I want and need from this. I get to release them, forgo dealing with their emotions and attachments and mental stability. Lilith takes over all of this, and I can move forward without a single bond holding me back. They easily feed all four of us, but their true connection lies with Lilith and Lilith alone.

Except Brielle. She's a been a difficult break in shifting her true draw to my sister.

"Uh oh," Aggie giggles quietly, turning on her heels and skipping toward the door ahead of us. There's a single stone in the center, just like each of the other seven doors lined across the wall. Each stone is different however, holding various facets and characteristics unique to them. Skilla's door contains Lapis Lazuli, which encourages love, intuition, inner truth.

My favorite stone of them all.

A strange spark of relief hits my chest at the notion of this specific room belonging to Skilla. But there's no reason for that, and I blame these unfortunate thoughts on the fact that I'm starving.

"Ahead," I say, holding back every ounce of emotion I could possibly feel. "This one is yours."

Skilla moves silently, not meeting a single gaze as we pass the others. Aggie opens the door first and steps inside, a wide smile spreads across her face as she turns to face us and tucks her hands behind her back. "Well? What do you think?" she asks brightly, but Skilla doesn't even have the chance to look around yet.

Nonetheless, she answers her, and the severe bite to her tone doesn't go unnoticed. "What do I think of what? The prison in which I'm being held against my will?" She looks around and steps deeper into the room.

Turning toward Aggie, her voice is laced with sarcasm. “The pretty sheets will make my death much sweeter. Thanks, girl.” She matches Aggie’s smile, big and wide and showing her teeth.

A mix of entertainment and humor ripples through me. I like this bit of fight in her, and sarcasm has strange effects on libido. I love a girl who bites back. But Aggie’s reaction is different, and the smile immediately falls from her face as she stalks toward Skilla.

I shut the door behind us quickly, noticing just at the last minute that Brielle was stepping toward us. I close her out, and the others, but as I turn my attention back toward my sister and Skilla, I find them pressed against one of the posts around her bed. Aggie’s chest is tightly up against Skilla’s, her hands around her throat while her face is tilted back and her eyes boring into my sisters.

“Do you think you can hurt me?” Skilla asks, as if she has no idea what we can do to her. God, she has to be lying to herself. She knows she isn’t in Kansas anymore.

“Oh darling, I know I can.” Aggie hisses dramatically. “Now, I designed this entire space for you. I washed the sheets, I picked out your pillows. I filled the fucking potpourri in those dishes over there you ungrateful bitch.” She nods to the grand dresser on the left side of the room. Black and gold, with a dish of said potpourri and also a vase of white and blue roses decorating the top.

White and blue. I roll my eyes at the obvious gesture. I swear, Aggie is always one step ahead and is outrageously talented in reading emotions.

“All right, you two. Come on.” I step forward, my hand gripping my sisters upper arm as I pull her back and free Skilla from her hold. I turn toward Aggie, “Let us be. You’ve done a fine job here and I’m sure Skilla is beyond thankful for what you’ve done.”

“No, I am—” she starts, but I snap my angry eyes toward hers in a way that has her shutting up instantly.

Aggie huffs, crossing her arms over her chest as she turns toward the door and stalks away from us. “She better be, or I’ll have my own fun with her the next time I’m hungry.”

The hell she will. My mind instinctually reprimands, but I shake the thought free and give her a half smile instead. “Leave, I have work to do.”

Aggie’s face splits into that grin again, she leans slightly, so she can look around my frame and meet Skilla’s eyes. My sister lifts her fingers in

a little wave as she departs. “Have fun!”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Skilla

A million thoughts. Literally. A trillion, even. So many, I can't keep count of them. I can't make sense of them. Shit, I don't even know where to start here.

But there is one thing that is abundantly clear. A feeling, one I have no war with, one that screams its identity easily and freely.

Anger.

Full blown, complete and total rage.

The second Aggie shuts the door to my new "room," and I fucking lose it. Suddenly, my hands are flying forward and against Na'amah's chest. I shove her backwards, a snarl ripping free of my throat as I push her again. "What the fuck is this place?" I yell, and her hands are quick to snap up and grip my wrists tightly. But I'm not finished, and I keep throwing my palms forward while I try to hit her anywhere I can possibly make contact. "What are you people? What is the goddamn Bite, and the fucking thrones, and what the hell happened in that room back there with Lilith?" The questions spill uncontrollably, my chest heaves with rapid gasps while I try to catch my breath between words. It's impossible though, and I feel the rhythm in which my heart thumps maniacally under my ribs as I fight against her.

Before I know what's happening, I'm being thrown back against the grand bed in this room. It's huge, easily a king with ornate golden posts at each of the four corners. The bedspread is a mix of white and blue, the same color as the gemstone encased in the door. More pillows than I know what to do with are intricately placed perfectly at the head of the bed and I

can't argue with the fact that it feels wildly comfortable as I fall back against soft mattress.

Na'amah is forcing my hands down beside my head, her knees climbing on top and straddling my waist in the same moment. She's towering over me, and I'm thrashing my head back and forth in hopes that my body throws off her balance and momentum. "Calm down," she speaks, her voice taking on a quality I haven't heard her use before. It's soft, and catches me completely off guard as I still my hands in her hold. She adjusts, subtly, and one of her knees slips between my thighs while my eyes train in on her.

Her chest is rising and falling as well, in quicker movements than I anticipate coming from her steely demeanor. I notice the way her soft tits spill just slightly from the tight crop top she's wearing, and my eyes absently settle there for a moment until I look back up and realize she's watching me as well. Only her gaze is glued to my parted lips, and as I feel them suddenly go dry, my tongue slips out and along my lower one. A mix of salt and blood linger in my mouth, no doubt remnants of the insane night I've had so far.

She watches me, and for one of the first times, I feel something thicker surge between us. A heat, a wave of darkness tied to lust and desire. And as Na'amah rolls her hips slightly forward, her knee presses against my core in a way that has me slightly grinding back. I can tell I'm wet, that hunger of arousal surprisingly pooling inside of me.

But all of this is grounded in so much anger and hatred it's hard to make sense of. Am I turned on? Or am I so overcome with emotion and confusion that I'm mixing the signals now?

"What are you?" I ask again, my back arching just slightly off the bed while I force my chin up and my gaze into hers.

"Don't play dumb. You should know what we are by now. *Where* you are." She replies flatly and my eyes narrow at her arrogant tone.

"Dumb? You're fucking kidding, right? You kidnapped me. Stole me from my home. Dragged me through the goddamn earth and into what, a fucking castle? Not only that, but it looks like you've done this before with other girls." I try to pull out of her hold but she presses my wrists even harder into the mattress. A frustrated groan escapes my lips and I force my eyes shut for a moment while I try to rein in my anger. "I want answers, Na'amah."

“Alca.”

“What does that even mean?” I scream, and suddenly one of my wrists is freed when her hand grips the base of my jaw. Her fingers bite into my flesh, her lips quickly press against my ear. My heart pounds, my skin breaking out in goosebumps while a rush of electricity bursts between us. Anger fuels my desire, but it’s there nonetheless and I find myself using the weight of my hips to try and push her away...or grind against that goddamn leg of hers even more.

Fuck, I can’t make sense of any of this.

Her breath is the only thing in my ear, a consistent sound and feeling I’m oddly calmed by. I cling to it, where everything else is uncertain and strange—I’m alive. She’s alive.

“*Master.*” She finally whispers the word in a single breath against my skin. I go hot, even with the icy temperature of her body, I’m consumed in flames.

“I will never call you that,” I reply, my lips pulling into a grin while her mouth falls slowly down the column of my neck. My heart continues racing, my skin pulling tight and my legs falling wider as she nestles in close.

“I don’t ask twice.” This time, her words are a threat and I feel the sudden scrape of two sharp points along my throat. *What in the—* “Do you understand me?” Her other hand releases my secured wrist and tightly wraps around my ribs. Her arm slips underneath me, pulling my body hard against hers while her hips move forward. I can’t help but roll mine back against her as well, that electrical icy current growing and twisting through me as I touch her.

I don’t understand how I’m so turned on here. I want to fight and fuck and refuse to give in while also surrendering to her every demand.

My mind blanks for a moment, going completely quiet while I focus on the feeling of those points on my neck. Her lips close, sucking on my skin before biting in a way that elicits a quiet moan from my mouth. I want to fight this, I do. But I can’t, and I know I won’t in this moment. I can already tell.

Instantly, our bodies sync together in the ways we move. We’re grinding against each other, and I shift my own leg up so that her pussy is sliding along my knee as well. Fuck, I’m soaked, and I vaguely wonder if she’s as turned on as I am in this moment. Or is this all a game to her?

“Say it,” she demands and I can feel the way an orgasm is slowly building low in my belly. Arousal coats my inner thighs, and for a second, I almost give in to calling her master in the language she had spoken.

“No.” I refuse instead, pride swelling in my chest as I mentally stand tall against her. But her hand slips between my legs now, her fingers pressing against the soaked fabric of my tight spandex shorts I wore to the club earlier. Her knee and fingers work together, brushing against my clit without actually slipping underneath my clothes.

HOLY SHIT, SHE ISN'T EVEN FUCKING ME AND YET IT FEELS LIKE everything inside of me is begging to be consumed by her hold.

I moan against her touch, my hands moving to tighten around the back of her neck and pull those lips and teeth tighter against me. The tips scrape even deeper, and I absently wonder if she'll draw blood with whatever this is.

Blood.

The word triggers something in my mind, a familiar warning sign, but one I can't decipher quite yet while I'm working closer to an orgasm as she touches me.

“Are you going to come for me?” she asks instead, her voice sounds dark and breathy as I move closer and closer to that coil snapping inside of me. God, I want her to fuck me, but I'll come just like this for her as well.

“Yes,” I whimper, rolling my hips up to meet her fingers as she works me closer. I'm nearing the edge, her teeth biting at my skin in ways that will surely leave marks tomorrow. My own hold on her tightens, my back arching off the bed as I press my tits against hers.

“Good,” she replies haughtily, and in the next moment she's completely removed herself from my body. She stands back, stepping away from the bed while I lie back completely open and exposed in the wake of a near orgasm.

My head snaps up, my brows dipping low in confusion while my eyes narrow at her. “What the hell?” I bite out, shifting up on my elbows while she turns and slowly walks to my door.

“There's a dinner party at the end of the week. You'll attend this with the other girls. You'll spend a portion of the night with Lilith. Get to know the others before then; it's important to connect with them. They are your

lifeline outside of me.” She doesn’t even look back as she addresses me, instead she moves toward my door and wraps her fingers around the knob. Once she finally looks back, she meets my gaze head on.

She looks completely fucking unphased. Not a single ounce of arousal, or lust written on her features. I’m here, laying on this bed without any fucking answers, my pussy wet and throbbing from being worked so close to an orgasm without release, and a new fiery rage burning under my skin at the realization that this was her plan all along.

“You didn’t let me fucking come?!” I sit up, speaking each word clearly as I watch her.

She lifts her fingers to her lips, her heated eyes glued to me as her tongue slips out and along the length of them. God, those lips and the movement absolutely seduce me, and I my eyes widen as I watch her. “You didn’t call me Alca. I told you, I do not ask twice, little Kitten. Your actions have consequences.”

Jesus. Fucking. Christ.

I want to scream. I want to throw things. I want answers and a release and the knowledge of where the fuck I am. I feel as though I’m having a full blown tantrum, and that in itself is embarrassing. But how do I process any of this in any logical, mature way?

I don’t know. Anything. I know nothing.

“And your actions don’t? The one who kidnaps and assaults and rapes and kills?” I say angrily through clenched teeth.

“I don’t rape,” she states, turning her back on me and pulling the door open before looking back over her shoulder once more. “Believe me Kitten, you’ll be begging for a single scrap of what I can give you soon.” She immediately shuts the door behind her before I even have a chance to respond to that presumptuous remark.

I don’t fucking beg anymore. Not for anyone.

I jump up and rush forward, moving to slam my door shut when I catch the tail end of Na’amah walking into another room. It’s the girl from earlier, when I walked through initially. I felt a different wash of emotions from her when she saw us, something much colder and distant than the other two girls who welcomed me.

My eyes follow them, and the sudden stab of jealousy makes me even angrier to acknowledge. So I don’t.

I stalk over toward the bed and climb on top before resting my back against the pillows Aggie placed at the headboard. I tightly shut my eyes, forcing steady breaths as I count to twenty in a whisper. I try focusing my thoughts, attempt processing what I'm seeing. Key words spring to mind while I try to understand all of this.

Underworld. Blood. The Bite. Thrones. Survival. Escape.

My mind begins putting pieces together, but I can hardly believe what I'm thinking. None of this can be real, can it? My throbbing core and raging headache say otherwise. The soft sheets under my ass and the beautifully decorated room surrounding me says this is all very fucking real.

Knock knock.

I don't respond, but my eyes quickly widen and dart toward the door as it's slowly eased open. "Hello?" a quiet, kind voice offers as a young woman suddenly emerges from behind my door. A few other girls follow after her, and I'm surrounded by four women I've never met before.

"Hi," I respond, unsure of what to ask and say and expect from them.

"We thought we should introduce ourselves. I'm Sera." This one is tall, several inches above me, and wears her long, golden blonde hair in a braid falling down her back. She seems sweet, and quiet. Her small voice and easy smile work to at least calm my nerves slightly.

"I'm Lilac," the next one says. Her smile is bright and big with her curly dark hair pulled up into a messy knot on top of her head. "And this is Fira and Thalia." The other two are hovering closer toward the door. Thalia is tall as well, her frame containing beautiful curves and swells that have me taking a second glance as I watch her. Fira is only an inch or two shorter, but her hair is raven black and hangs in waves around her shoulders while she observes in silence.

"I'm Skilla." I greet all of them, nodding and doing the best I can to offer a sweet smile in welcome. But I want answers, and it takes everything in me to not ask them right away.

"We also have Brielle, but she's busy at the moment. I'm sure you'll meet her later." Thalia speaks this time, her Spanish accent and smooth whiskey tone adding to the calm demeanor she radiates.

Brielle. She must be the one I saw Na'amah with just moments ago. I fight the instinctual urge not to dislike her without even having met her.

“We know this can all be...overwhelming. But we wanted you to know you aren’t alone. And we can answer any questions you probably have regarding all of *this*.” Fira’s voice is lower, like a smooth vintage wine coating the room in her sweetness.

My eyes brows raise high on my face, my eyes widening as a scoff uncontrollably escapes my throat. “Questions? I have all the questions. I know nothing. First of all, where are we?”

They all go silent and awkwardly glance in each other’s direction, clearly unsure of how to answer this for me. God damn, basic question number one and we’re already having issues.

“Seriously? First question and we’re—” I start, but Thalia is quick to cut me off.

“The Underworld. You’re in the Underworld.” Straight to the point. Her tone is strong and confident as she reveals this.

I blank, wishing I just knew exactly what that meant. “Can we elaborate here?”

“Hell. That’s what most people know this as. It’s essentially Hell.” This time it’s Sera speaking up.

“Hell doesn’t exist,” I refute. I cannot actually believe this, they cannot actually believe this, right?

“It does. I understand it’s hard to grasp at the moment. But you’ll learn to accept it eventually.”

All right, moving on. Clearly we’re on different pages here. “What are they? All four of them.” I’m referring to the sisters. This is truthfully the biggest question I have of all. I want to confirm that my suspicions are inaccurate and ridiculous.

“Vampires. The four Queens of Hell. Na’amah, Agrat, Eisheth, and Lilith.” Lilac this time. Her honey sweet tone breaks the absolutely absurd news in what feels like rainbows and Kittens.

Vampires. Blood. The Bite. The Underworld.

Words spiral and shout and scream and cry in my mind over and over again.

This is already what I was daring to think earlier. But never, never in a million years would I have thought I was correct.

I’m completely silent, each of them watching me intensely while my brain computes and processes what I’m hearing. But in the next instant, everything changes, and a completely maniacal laugh bubbles up from my

throat and spills free. I'm laughing loudly, throwing my head back while everything inside of me refuses to believe this is real.

"No, no fucking way," I try to say, but I'm laughing so hard I can't seem to catch my breath. The humor is absolutely outrageous, but as my laughter begins shifting into something else, a new wave of fear and anger rip through me. My uncontrollable giggles suddenly turn into tears. Hot streams slip down my cheeks while my smile vanishes into a humorless sob of misery.

"No, no, no, no, no. This isn't true. This is a fucking dream, it's a dream." I mutter the words under my breath, rolling back on my ass and tucking my knees up against my chest while I mentally beg to be woken from this nightmare.

Vampires. Real, living, breathing Vampires.

I truly have traded one monster for another.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Skilla

I *don't have my phone.*

I don't even know where or when I lost it. But it's gone. I shouldn't be surprised. They'd never let me keep something that could somehow tie me to civilization. Fuck, would my phone even work down here?

Stagnant, mundane thoughts have been running through my head all night. I have no idea what time it is, there are no clocks. But the single, large window in my room at least tells me it's dark outside. So either middle of the night or early morning.

I can't sleep. I close my eyes, repeating little phrases in my head in hopes that it calms my mind enough to pass out. But I can't, and I miss the uncomfortable itch of my own sheets, and the familiarity of the monster in my own home. It's different now, when I have no idea what to expect from these people—*Vampires*. At least I knew exactly what Rowan was expecting when he snuck into my room in the middle of the night.

When I wasn't behaving correctly, or providing enough help around the house when I was home, when the chores weren't done or his laundry wasn't folded. I knew what was coming. I could navigate those situations best, prepare myself mentally to detach from reality. But here? I have to stay aware. I have no fucking choice. Because what I may miss here could lead to far worse things than what even my step-brother could do to me.

And I've never been faced with worse than him.

So, no. I can't fucking sleep. I sigh out a breath of frustration, sitting up in bed and running the palms of my hands over my eyes. My heart is thumping at a consistently higher rate, so I focus on steadying my breath

and clearing my mind. It's time to get my own emotional state under control. The more aware and focused I am, the more I can learn, observe, and plan my escape.

Dropping my hands to my legs, I stand and make my way toward the dresser on the opposite end of my room. I run my fingers along the decorative edges, golden swirls and lines are flaked in blue paint as well. It almost looks frozen, like ice has just barely settled over the top. Pulling open the top drawer, I quickly realize there are already sets of clothes neatly folded within. Everything looks simple but comfortable and I pull out a light blue long sleeved cotton top and matching joggers.

After quickly dressing into something far more pleasant, I fold my own clothes and lay them on top of the dresser before stepping toward the window and looking outside.

I'm not entirely sure what I expect, but it isn't necessarily what I'm met with when my eyes scan over the expanse of dark woods and green grass below. The sky is nearly black, and while I don't see a moon, there is white light emanating from somewhere. The strangest part of what I see however, are the streaks of red hovering in the sky above. I vaguely think of the northern lights, but these are something else entirely. I don't feel a sense of awe as I watch them, instead, an eerie wave of absence and vacancy build in my chest.

Goosebumps break out over my shoulders, and I run my hands up and down my upper arms as a shiver rolls down my spine.

Cold. A breeze of chilled air blows around me, and I quickly look back over my shoulder as if someone is watching. Na'amah's name springs to mind, but I don't see her, I don't hear anyone in fact and I wonder if this would be the best time to explore the castle on my own.

I doubt someone would hear me sneak out of my room, so I slowly walk toward my door and quietly pull it open, carefully peeking around the common area for any open doors or late nighters who may still be awake. But there's nothing, so I step out and shut the door behind me, letting my bare feet move across the soft carpet below me.

No creaks sound under my steps, and as soon as I make it to the narrow staircase, that familiar chill rolls over my spine again. I look behind me a second time, taking note of every closed door and the silence around me.

Everything is fine. I'm alone. I'm safe. I can explore and ideally find a potential escape route while everyone is asleep.

I hurry down the stairs, trailing my fingers along the wall for balance as I step along the cold stone below. For a moment, I worry I won't be able to see anything past these stairs. But the moment I reach the bottom, I notice the torches of purple flames lining the hallway before me. Purple flames, interesting, I'll have to ask about what that means if I'm still around in the morning.

I'd like to try and escape right now, disappear in those woods before anyone wakes in the morning. But I'm not naive enough to think I'd survive in the Underworld alone, without any knowledge of what lays ahead.

So, I slowly move down the hallway instead, my eyes scanning over every painting hanging on the walls. It's each of the sisters, or Queens as Lilac referenced them earlier tonight. Eisheth is first, and then Aggie. Each painting captures their beauty but not nearly enough to match their true elegance. I pause as I come to Na'amah's, and find myself indescribably drawn to her portrait.

She's stunning in a way that both breathes her femininity and proudly displays her masculine side. Both weave so seamlessly within her, and my head tilts to the side as I find myself in a state of admiring her.

I shouldn't be. I know this. My logical mind reminds of everything she's stolen from me thus far. Of the ways she used me earlier by bringing me so close to an orgasm and then denying it immediately.

And yet, those ice blue eyes hold the same electric current that courses between us when she's near. Each paint stroke carries this strange tether begging me to step closer, to run my fingers along her skin and surrender to every demand she makes of me.

Suddenly, the faintest fall of a footstep sounds behind me, and my head whips back while I stumble away from the painting against the wall behind me. I wait, my heart hammering loudly in my chest as my skin goes hot and palms begin to sweat. Closing my eyes, I quiet my breaths, forcing them slow and shallow while I strain to hear for any further steps.

Several minutes pass in complete silence. Nothing catches my attention however, so I caution my first step forward again, opening my eyes and looking to my left and right before moving further.

I don't see anyone, and I don't hear anything, so I hurry down the hall until I reach the small doorway leading into the throne room. There is a part of me warning my mind to turn around and go back to bed. Maybe

this is as far as I should go tonight, but a louder portion of my mind is saying I haven't actually found anything yet, and I'd like to take a closer look at the other doorway in the room ahead of me. I have an inkling that one may lead outside, and that will be my first means of escape when the time comes.

This time, I very slowly wrap my fingers around the iron lever resting on the wooden door ahead of me. I pull it down as gently as I can possibly manage, holding my breath while the faintest creak breaks out as I push it lower.

"No, no, no," I barely whisper the words, but panic grips my throat until the quiet click alerts me that I can finally push it open. Moving lightly, I only open the door enough to allow me space to slip through, and I intentionally don't shut it as I finally step into the grand space I was in yesterday. I breathe out a sigh of relief, inhaling in the next moment deeply while my lungs fill with oxygen and my heart rate calms.

I run my palms up and down my pants, taking the moment to relax before raising my eyes and letting them settle on the four large thrones ahead of me.

I shouldn't go near them, I don't think. But the curious side of me is urging me to step closer. I glance around the large room again, ensuring there isn't anyone watching or any distant steps I may be hearing around me. But there's nothing, again, so I take a single step forward and toward the thrones.

That chill blows around my shoulders again, for the third time tonight. Pulling my skin tight while my shoulders shake through another shiver that I quickly ignore. I can only assume the air filtration in this place is horrendous, and a draft is absolutely probable in every room or hall of the castle.

I move forward, each stride light and steady until I finally reach the few steps that lead up to each throne. Pacing up them, I'm thankful my feet don't make a single sound potentially alerting the others.

Immediately, I'm drawn to the single throne belonging to Na'amah. My eyes linger over the others, and pause briefly over Lilith's, but ultimately settle on the one directly in front of me.

Hers is so intricately designed after Winter. Wild, chaotic wisps of what looks ice flare out from the edges of the throne. I swear, it almost glows in the darkness, that bright blue electricity practically flowing from

every inch beautifully. I lean even closer, my eyes trailing from the top, down the back and over each complexly engraved arm.

It's absolutely stunning. My entire self is enraptured by the beauty of it. But as I study the details, I realize hers is covered in tiny gemstones like Aggie's is. Only Na'amah's stones are very specifically white and various shades of blue. Of course, this was designed exactly for her and I lift my fingers to gently touch them.

I don't even know why I'm so bewitched by this. I want to touch it, I want to sit within it, I want to feel the stones and engravings against my skin as if it'll somehow bring me closer to her. Suddenly, the word I so avidly refuse to speak begs to spill from my lips. As if I can't even control it and my skin is overwhelmed by the feeling of chill from earlier. But I welcome it this time, breathing it in while my tongue forms the unspoken word.

"Alca," I whisper so quietly I can barely hear it myself. But the instant I do, right before my fingers finally make contact with Na'amah's throne, I'm completely paralyzed in fear instead.

"Not exactly when I wanted to hear you say it, but satisfied nonetheless hearing that word slip free of your lips, little Kitten." A sharp, cold, blade rests against my throat as her heated voice moves against my ear. I can feel her powerful body at my back, her hands tightly securing me against her frame before I could ever touch her throne.

"Na'amah." I breathe out her name as well, the word coming through as disappointment floods my chest at being caught. I was so fucking close to something I could almost feel it. As if each of these thrones were alive and carrying secrets.

MY HEART IS RACING, AND I WONDER IF SHE CAN HEAR IT. DOES IT CALL TO her? My blood? Is that why she chose me?

"Not to you," she grinds out, and her tone is laced in obvious irritation. She's angry, I can practically sense it radiating from her, and I'm immediately afraid of what I can expect to come next.

This isn't familiar to me, her methods of punishment, and I have no doubt that punishing is exactly what she intends to do to me.

Her hold on me constricts my movements entirely, I'm completely at her beck and call as she pulls back and drags me down the stairs and into

the center of the room. Her breathing is steady and strong against my ear, my own voice completely muted by the knife against my throat. I dare not speak, but I refuse to beg for release from her.

I already know that's not possible.

"I was going to give you time to adjust here, connect with the others before I started with you. But you don't know how to simply follow along, do you?" She pushes me toward the big white doors we came through yesterday. "Keep your head down, do as you're told. Are those all outrageously complex concepts to you? Do you think it was smart to sneak around the kingdom at night?" Annoyance is evident in her tone and the way I can hear her teeth grinding beside my ear. We continue moving forward and I continue ignoring her.

She doesn't stop however, and with every demand and sarcastic remark at my back, I'm growing even more irritable with her. She's leading me down a dark hallway, several large, iron doors line either side of us. Each look exactly the same, with no distinguishing marks to differentiate one from the other.

She doesn't remove the knife at my throat, she doesn't put an inch of distance between us as we walk. I remain completely cinched to her chest with one arm wrapped powerfully around my waist and the other threatening the blade while we walk.

"My sweet, fragile, Kitten." She replies in a hushed tone, but there isn't any sweet endearment in her voice as she says it. She's mocking me.

"Do you ever shut up when you're like this?" I finally snap, my own frustration getting the best of me. Immediately, I know it was the wrong decision and just as I assume we are passing another door, I'm yanked to the right and roughly pushed through it with Na'amah following behind me.

I fall to the ground, a yelp escaping my mouth as my hands and knees hit hard, cold stone. My body is still sore from my encounters yesterday, and my dry lips crack as I wince at the pain. The scent of wet cement and stale air wafts over me, and when I lift my head to gauge the space we've entered, I realize I can't see anything. But the sounds of Na'amah's heated steps sound out behind me in consistent, terrifying patterns.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. I've gone too far.

My skin prickles with erratic goosebumps, my blood rolling in anticipation as the footsteps suddenly halt and I'm surrounded by silence

in this dark room. My heart is hammering in my chest, a shiver running down my spine as I struggle to adjust to the bleak darkness. I wish I could see what the fuck was happening right now, but I can't.

"Focus," Na'amah suddenly speaks. Her tone lacking even the slightest emotion. "You'll need to do exactly as I say in order to survive this. Do you understand me?" *Fuck, is she serious? Survive what? What the hell is she about to do to me?*

I glance around again, looking in the direction I believe I hear her voice. But it's difficult, because the stone room echoes in various places with her sadistic and vacant words. I can't even fight this. I have nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. I turn around and sit back on my ass, inhaling a deep breath and trying to clear my mind in order to find her. "Yes." I finally reply, because there really isn't another option for me here.

"You're going to be a good girl for me, Skilla. Do everything I ask, when I ask, and I'm going to make sure you never wander around the kingdom at night again. Tell me I'm right," she says, only this time her voice changes tremendously. It's laced with something new now, that iconic sensual authority seemingly woven into her DNA. It instantly has a pulse running through my core, and my head floods with the memories of how she touched me earlier tonight.

"You're right." I give it to her, because these are easy things in the moment, and they are currently keeping me alive.

"Good girl." My head snaps to the right this time as she speaks, her voice completely changing directions in the room and catching me off guard. And now she's closer, far closer, the icy chill she radiates is flowing around me, coming from every direction so I have no idea where she's moving. "Are you afraid?" Her voice slowly whispers in my left ear, the cold sparking along my skin as if ice was forming in my fucking flesh. How the hell is this real? Feeling her like this seems impossible.

She's everywhere. In my blood. Along my skin. Fucking with my head.

Fear builds its home in my mind, growing and causing every decision I make to be uncertain. But arousal is there as well, warring in the same moments for control over the fight.

"Yes," I reply, the only word I seem to be able to form tonight. "But I have questions myself." I lift my hands in front of me, splaying my fingers wide in order to hopefully brush against her. She's silent at first, and I

come in contact with absolutely nothing while the temperature in the room continues dropping.

“I’ll give you one answer, once we’re finished. And only if you do as you’re told.” Her voice is low and smooth in front of me now. I want to bathe in her sound as it flows along my heated form, and my head tilts to the side as I surrender to listening. “Get on your knees.”

Pausing, I consider momentarily whether I should oblige. But I’ve already agreed to whatever is coming, and if I can gain the answers to my questions, I believe this may be worth it. Also, quietly, in the back of my mind, deep in my stomach, there’s something else lingering there. A seed of submission, the need to do as I’m told and release the control I have to so frequently hold when I’m on my own or with Rowan. This is such a different dynamic, and one a small part of me is desperate to give into. Hell, even K and Ruby weren’t like *this* when I was with them.

I shift forward, slowly, feeling the cool ground under my knees. My palms rest on the floor as I adjust, small bits of what I assume must be dirt and rocks press into my skin in little pricks of sharp pain. Brushing them off on my legs, I finally sit back, resting against my calves as I look up and scan the room for her.

Nothing. That familiar wave of fear and anticipation wash over me. My hands tremble against my legs and it’s one of the hardest struggles of my life to remain calm in this.

“I can’t even see you,” I mutter under my breath, and suddenly the frozen tenor of her voice speaks from just behind me.

“That’s the point, Kitten. You don’t get to watch.” She breathes the commanding words against my ear. Her lips brushing along my flesh as her tongue slips out to taste me. I gasp, sucking my bottom lip into my mouth and biting down between my teeth.

There’s something so incredibly erotic in all of this and I can’t even begin to understand it. The idea that I could find this turning me on in any sort of way has me feeling insane and as if there’s something wrong with me. I was kidnapped for fuck’s sake, nothing about this situation should be making me wet and curious to push forward.

My eyes are wide, still searching the space for any ounce of light or forms in the darkness. But there’s nothing, and I’m completely blinded while every other sense works on overdrive. My lips part and my tongue slips out, tasting the salt on my skin and the staleness in the air. I focus on

the sounds around me, any footfalls, or even the intake of breath as Na'amah remains at my back. She's quiet, but the simple reminder that we're both alive and here continues serving as a means to calm me.

Touch. This one is the most intoxicating. But it's erratic, confusing, and completely overthrows my logical mind.

I'm feeling a million different aspects to this. Internally, my body is on fire. Arousal, curiosity, fear, intrigue—all are emotions currently twisting through every part of me.

Physically, I'm frozen. Ice and chill surround the air around me, and pain lingers under my knees and that ache remains in my muscles. I'm also wet, my thighs unintentionally shifting every so often as I try to distract myself from the burning desire to be touched and fucked.

Mentally? Well, that's just an absolute disaster. Logic has completely evacuated the space. My body is in survival mode, relying on basic needs to be met.

Food. Shelter. Sex.

Sex is the one currently at the forefront, and if it makes space for my logical mind to re-enter and get those answers, then I'm surrendering as much as I can manage.

Her hands suddenly reach around me from behind and grip my wrists. She holds me tightly, dragging my own hands slowly up my waist, brushing over my own tits, and above my head. She settles them at the back, weaving my fingers together so that my back is arched and facing straight ahead.

"This is your submissive position. If at any point you're uncertain of what to do or if you know you need to be punished, or I call on you, you immediately wait for me like this. Understand?" She speaks so surely, her tone an easy demand without any room for question. She's breathing in sync with my own, her hands slowly releasing my wrists while I remain in that position.

She moves down my body, her fingers tracing lines that feel like ice burning against me. It's so cold it stings, and I'm gasping as she slips under my top and pulls it over my head. I assume she drops it to the floor, because her hands are on me again in the next instant, running over every inch of my body in gentle slow patterns. I'm breathing heavily and quickly, struggling to remain calm in the midst of my heightened senses.

“Stand up and take off your pants.” She demands, her tone thick with tension as I feel her move away from me. God, I don’t want her to stop, and the immediate way my body responds to her distance is practically embarrassing. I don’t want to say I’m addicted to her, but fuck, it feels like it. My skin and form swaying back to be near her. “I want you naked and on your knees, now Kitten.”

The demand intoxicates my blood, flashing through my core in sparks of arousal and need. I’m so fucking wet, and I can’t stop the urge to stand and do exactly as she says. So I do, and as I slip my hands under the hem of my sweatpants, I sense every single moment of the soft fabric dragging across my skin. I notice everything, so much more than I usually do when I’m deprived of my other senses.

This is insane, I’ve never experienced something like this. It’s in the atmosphere. My mind is clinging to and amplifying every single sensation my physical body is perceiving. It’s a new level of arousal, one that leaves me high and euphoric, captivated by her touch and needy for more.

I step out of my sweats and the cool breeze I’ve been noticing this entire time blows across my entire figure. My skin lights up with the chill and a shiver races down my spine in response.

“On your knees, don’t make me ask again.” A lash, her tone feels like a whip striking the ambiance around me. My heart pounds uncontrollably and I instantly shift back down onto my knees while my hands feel for the ground so I don’t stumble. Remembering the details of what she described earlier, I sit back on my calves, slowly raising my hands and lacing my fingers behind my head.

I release steady breaths, the anticipating of what’s to come eats at my sanity while I wait.

“Good girl,” she speaks quietly but powerfully. Her words elicit a heated breath from my lips while I attempt holding back a small whimper. Why does that sound so good coming from her? My pussy throbs, my chest swelling in pride for that simple bit of praise. It’s ridiculous, and yet I want to hear more of it at the same time. “You look so pretty for me on your knees like this, Kitten.” This time, her words breath into my ear and her lips brush over my skin. I want to reach for her, but I keep my hands still instead, locked behind my head as her fingers suddenly stroke up my thigh.

Breathe, Skilla. I remind myself by mentally repeating the sentiment over and over again.

She moves to my inner thigh, her chest hovers over my back and I can feel her tits press against me. I can't help it, I lean back just slightly, craving more of her in any way I possibly can. Her fingers move higher, and her lips work over my neck in gentle, slow kisses. I can hardly believe she's being this kind, and as her thumb sweeps up to brush over my pussy, I moan at the simple touch.

As soon as that sound leaves my mouth, her fingers bite roughly into my upper thighs as she yanks them apart. I yelp, my hands falling instinctually to the floor to catch myself before I lose balance.

"Don't fucking move," she snaps, commanding me still as I quickly put my hands back behind my head. There's that dark demeanor, the familiar frozen exterior that I've become so used to. I release several rapid breaths, my eyes darting around in the bleak darkness for any of light. For a moment, I almost panic at the continuous reminder that I am truly stuck here.

"You are to stay in your room once everyone has gone to bed. I monitor the grounds at night, and will know if anyone leaves their rooms. Do not explore, do not attempt escaping, do not speak to anyone you've not met. Do you understand me?" she asks, but it's not truly a question.

There's only one right answer here.

"I have to learn this place if I'm to stay here. Right? Become accustomed to my so called home." I tread a very thin line with this question, and for some reason, a part of me likes the way I know this will push her. I'm terrified and turned on, a dangerous mix for this situation.

Her fingers move closer to my core again. My legs are spread wide for her, my pussy wet and open and aching to be touched. I absently roll my hips forward as her slow touch tempts me even more. At first, I'm shocked as one of her fingers slides through my pussy up to my clit. Immediately, I'm moaning, quick breaths leaving my lips as my head falls back against her shoulder.

But it's the sting that comes next that truly snaps me back to attention. Her touch vanishes before coming back with a slap from her palm on my soaked cunt. Hard and fast, I cry out in pain and move to slam my thighs shut against her touch.

“Don’t fucking move,” she bites out, and this time, her teeth sink into my shoulder without breaking skin as she pries my legs apart. “If I have to tell you again, you won’t be able to sit down tomorrow.”

I force my hands still and use every ounce of my own strength to keep my legs wide open for her. My core is pulsing from both my own need and the throbbing pain remaining from her slap. In the next moment, one of her hands weaves through my hair and she yanks my head back against her. Small whimpers escape me even though I try to hold them back. I’m struggling to keep myself together, but the way my body and mind are completely split in desire has me reeling. The cold air blows across my flesh, slipping over my hardening nipples and tight breasts. Goosebumps explode across every inch of me and I slip my tongue out over my lower lip before biting down on it.

I try catching my breath, but Na’amah’s lips sweep along my neck, her teeth dragging along the narrow space and she kisses me tenderly before biting hard with a stinging mark.

Fuck, fuck. She has to be leaving marks, and I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want her to continue.

It’s a war, the sharp pain on my scalp where she so tightly holds me, and the fire blazing in my blood as she continues turning me on. Her hand slips between my legs, sliding through me and circling down around my opening. God, I want her to fuck me. So, my legs fall even wider as I try to roll into her touch. I’m needy, and I can’t help the way my hips thrust forward as I seek even more of her.

But as soon as I make the motion, her hand is gone and wrapped firmly around my throat. She’s yanking me up as I’m still restrained against her chest. I struggle and gasp as I rush to stand with her quick movements. “What did I tell you?” She grinds the words in my ear. I can feel her lips pulled back and the sharp points of what I know now must be her fangs scrape my ear as she speaks. “Say it.”

I don’t answer right away, but I know what I’ve done. Fuck, I should have known it would apply to *all* movements. She waits for only a moment longer before her hand smacks the side of my face, her fingers then grip my jaw, and she twists my head back toward her as my eyes meet her shocking gaze.

She’s electric, and the blue of her eyes glows in the darkness. It’s the only thing I’ve seen this entire time and it’s almost paralyzing to see it

now in this way. With her strong hand woven into my hair and holding my wrists together, and other hand so tightly controlling my jaw, I'm lost to her. The pain is now working in hand with my arousal, betraying any need for safety as my soul begs to surrender.

"Not to move," I respond this time, giving her exactly what she wants.

"And what did you do?" She repeats herself, stepping back and dragging me along with her while my feet scramble to keep her pace. I have no balance like this, and I'm relying on her completely to keep me upright.

"I moved." My voice is weak, my words strangled as her hold moves to focus on the front of my throat.

"My disobedient Kitten, now you'll have to be punished. Being so bad tonight, aren't you?" she whispers in the heated space around us. Once she stops moving, her hands force me still as well before completely releasing me and stepping back.

"Yes. I've been bad," I agree with her, my heart racing and my mind seeking out her praise as I give in to what's happening. My thighs rub together, an attempt to stifle the painful ache as I try being patient. "I'm sorry."

"Sorry means nothing to me." All of a sudden, she's completely detached as she says it, and I'm nervous at the sound of her swift vacancy.

My palms turn clammy and begin trembling in fear of what's to come. I can't help wondering if she'll bite me, but I hold on to hope that she wouldn't do something like that yet. This is what my training is all about, right? Being able to physically survive something like that is exactly what she needs from me. I have to trust she wouldn't put me through that just yet.

In the next instant, she's gone. I feel nothing in the space, not even her familiar chill. Until my hands are suddenly yanked straight over my head uncontrollably. What feels like ice burns through my flesh, completely overtaking my ability to move in the slightest. I'm pulled upwards, something securing my wrists above me in ways I can't possibly see in the darkness.

"What? What are you doing?" I begin to ask, my voice quivering with every word. She doesn't respond, and it's not until I'm barely touching the ground with my toes, body stretched and naked for her that I finally see her eyes light up in the shadows.

“There are things about the Underworld,” she pauses, her voice taking on a quality that seems distant and irritable. “About this kingdom, that will remain off limits to you. Exploring the grounds in the middle of the night is one of them.” She pulls it together when she continues, switching off the part that shared the slightest piece of emotion.

Instead, the atmosphere around us shifts, churning with a toxic ice that chills me to my bones. For a moment, I have the strangest feeling she’s leaving something out. I can’t even explain why exactly, but the way in which she speaks leaves me questioning whether there is something specific she wants me to stay away from.

I try to press my toes to the ground and falter, the ice digging into my wrists in a way I worry will cut my skin. What happens if I bleed around her? Around any of them? She was already around me yesterday after Rowan and I fought, but I’m unsure how blood affects her. My mind spirals with inconsistent thoughts, bouncing around to the millions of questions I have regarding this place. But I’m stuck on what she’s demanding, wishing there was some way I could have the freedom to learn a means of escape.

I have to get out of here somehow.

“When will that change?” I push her instead, curiously questioning whether this is a temporary rule put into place that I’ll one day be able to work around.

Her eyes quickly disappear and I snap my head to the side as I search for her. I’m completely caught off guard when something light and warm slides down my spine and over my ass. It feels like several strands, tiny scrapes of something along my skin I can’t decipher without seeing.

I gasp, arching my back and instinctually moving away from it out of fear. But it’s in the very next second I hear the sharp sound of a slap against skin and it takes me only the briefest moment of realization when the sting rushes to the soft flesh at the back of my thighs. I move to yank my legs away, picking them up when I notice that doing so puts immense strain on my wrists. I can’t hold myself up completely, and I cry out when she comes at me for a second hit in the same place.

“Fucking hell, are you kidding me?!” I grind through clenched teeth as the ache crests and then slowly subsides. I twist away as my heart thunders in my chest uncontrollably and my mind begins sorting through the chaotic feelings washing over me.

The strands of what I assume now is a leather flog—I've seen them at the club several times—are on me again, only this time, dragging across my stomach gently. I'm breathing heavily, mentally preparing myself for what's coming when she lets it fall even lower.

"It won't change. This is a dangerous place for a human, and now, you belong to me, Kitten. Your role is to submit, to prepare for the Bite, and to join Lilith's harem once you've been deemed ready."

You belong to me. The sentiment lights something strange inside of me. In a way I wasn't anticipating and I don't have the mental strength to process it at the moment.

Her words *almost* convince me she's completely uncaring—until the very end of her sentence. For some reason, I feel as though there's a slight change in her tone.

That piques my interest.

The flog slips between my thighs, and I mentally fight the spark of arousal in my blood as soon as she drags it over my core. She pulls back, hitting the strands against me in a much lighter touch this time. One that feels incredibly different, one that leaves me curious for more, and the pain amplifies my arousal instead of dousing it.

This blend of pain and sex is a masterpiece I'm unfamiliar with. It's an experience of control and surrender I'm so deeply drawn to. I'm torn on fighting and refusing and running. Or surrendering, chasing, and drowning in whatever this is becoming.

"You're fucking with my head," I stammer, inhaling a deep breath as the flog nears me once again. It starts at my shoulders, slowly and intricately tracing my collar bone while I tilt my head back and give her more room. "I can't even process what's happening to me now. I—" I pause, unsure of how much I can reveal here. "I feel as though I'm going crazy."

"Good," she whispers, her voice carrying an authority and sexual tension that works together seamlessly. "These coming weeks will be difficult for you." The flog snaps over my tits, harder this time, and I feel every ounce of pain and arousal in my core. I whimper and moan, aching for more while trying to avoid the sting she provides.

The flog comes to my ass this time, and my head falls forward on my shoulders while I breathe in anticipation. "You'll learn and connect with the others. But ultimately, you belong to me. You answer to me. Any

questions, you save for me. Until we transfer your bond to Lilith. You and I will become one, Kitten. There is no connection like the one we will share for this period of time in.”

“What if I don’t want to do any of this? What if I don’t want to join Lilith’s fucking harem, or take this fucking Bite?” I mutter between heated breaths. Frustration evident in my words as the fight in me rears her ugly head.

She snaps the flog harder against my ass, and I bite my lower lip as a rough groan breaks free of my mouth. That one fucking hurt. This time the sting sinks deep under my skin. I can tell my blood has already risen to the surface, and I’m surprised when I suddenly feel Na’amah’s palm slide over the space she just hit. Her fingers linger over my hot flesh, her thumb tracing the marks I assume she’s left. I subtly push back against her touch, seeking more of this gentle side after the agony she’s inflicted.

“You don’t have a choice,” she responds, her voice quiet, her touch soft until her fingers slide over my hip and move toward my lower stomach. God, the chill that follows her caress is such a wild blend of ice and fire.

How can someone leave such a dichotomy of sensation in her wake?

The obvious truth to her words sits at the forefront of my mind. The idea that I’ve somehow lost myself in this new world, one so unlike my home at the club, my experiences with the girls at Pandora’s Box. My step-brother.

Monsters for monsters.

Her hand slips lower, sliding between my thighs and slipping through my pussy. I moan around her touch, and her other hand moves over my throat as she pulls me against her. I’m still tied up, trapped in this space she’s kept me in. My body is sore from her punishment, my ass still lingers with an ache as she pulls my hips back against hers.

“I shouldn’t be doing this yet,” she suddenly whispers, surprising me completely. Her voice is laced with a tone of confusion and denial. My mind focuses on her words, trying to decipher what exactly that means. But I’m soon distracted when she slides over my clit at the same time as her nose slides up the column of my neck and into my hair. Fuck, I think she’s breathing me in, devouring my scent in ways that draw even more questions than resolutions.

“Answer my question now,” I beg her, wanting to ask what I was thinking earlier tonight. The thought has surfaced a few times, ever since

the girls revealed the four Queens were Vampires.

“I’ve answered far too many already, Kitten. And I haven’t gotten every ounce of submission and pain I’d like from you just yet.” She scoffs against my skin, her tongue slipping out and over my neck as if she’s tasting me. She grips me even tighter, her finger working over my clit before pulling up and sliding over my tits. Her palm rolls over me until she pinches my hard nipple between her finger tips, rolling and pulling as I unravel against her.

Her lips kiss and suck and devour my flesh in aggressive ways that leave the tension building around us. Everything grows quick and desperate, every touch, every bite, every moan coming quick and heady as if she’s losing control just as much as I am. The quietest, darkest part of me begs for her to do exactly that. But I dare not say it out loud.

“Can you sense my blood already? Without tasting it?” I breach the intense subject instead, assuming she probably won’t answer. But my head is falling back against her shoulder while she holds me roughly. My thighs tremble around her touch as she moves back to my wet pussy. I’m dying for her to slip inside of me, to fuck me while she tastes and takes whatever she wants.

She scoffs, and both of her hands move to my waist as her touch disappointingly stills. For a moment, everything quiets aside from our heavy breaths and shifting chests. I remain needy though, with my nipples stiff and sensitive in the darkness, the cold working as another sense my entire self clings to. But where her hands lay against my skin the temperature drops. I wish I had a logical explanation for it, but I don’t, and it feels as though my flesh freezes in a pain I’ve grown to crave in the short time we’ve known each other.

“With every step you take. Every word you speak, every moment you’re nearby. I can practically taste you. Your blood radiates off of you in everything you do.” She leans closer behind me, my skin almost burning now under her hands. I arch my back, attempting to twist out of her touch but she doesn’t let go. “I can hear your pulse every time I’m close. I can smell how turned on you are by the pain. Is there something wrong with you, my filthy little Kitten?” She whispers the fear into my ear, her tongue sliding against me as she takes another taste.

Oddly, the question hurts, and I’m surprised but taken aback. “Stop,” I reply immediately, my own embarrassment at her truth overriding my

uncontrollable lust. "I don't want to hear this."

She laughs as she finally releases my waist and steps back. The instant she's gone, the pain intensifies, as if she was both inflicting and soothing at the exact same time. "You wanted an answer."

She's gone. Emotionally now, and an indescribable annoyance builds in my chest at the ways she appears and disappears so rapidly.

In the next instant, I collapse to the ground unexpectedly. My hands and knees hit the hard stone as my body relinquishes to the exhaustion of what I've just been through.

Again, I haven't come. Worked closer and closer to an orgasm without release. I can feel a wild storm of emotions and energy unsettling inside of my body and mind. *Frustration, anger, the need for escape, desire, lust, tension.*

I spread my fingers wide on the ground below, squeezing my eyes tightly shut as I try to calm the inner chaos. "You're going to kill me," I speak the words on a hushed whisper, unsure if I even want a response from her. I don't think I do.

"You're right," she replies absently, as if it means nothing to her. I mean nothing to her.

God, I swear I'm experiencing whiplash. One second I think she feels something for me, for what she's doing, for my blood. The next moment I'm harshly reminded that this is all just a process for her. I'm simply one of a dozen projects she's had to break in order to take care of her sisters.

I'm a number. A blood bag. A meal.

Nothing of importance, and suddenly, dreadfully, my heart feels as though it cracks down the center. A flood of memories with K and Ruby and Rowan and my family come to drown my mind in excruciating pain.

I was supposed to write my own story here. I was supposed to create something of myself, show all of those people I don't fucking need them or their validation.

How quickly that was stripped of me permanently.

Without warning, I feel Na'amah's arms slip around my back and under my thighs. She lifts me easily, the frozen exterior she carries envelopes me in nothing comforting. Where I had been growing familiar to this chill, I now loathe it, and the ache settling in my skin and muscles no longer lights me on fire in lust, but extinguishes my curiosity.

I remain silent as she slowly steps us out of the room and into the hallway. Exhaustion overcomes me and I while I want to remain stiff and detached, I find my head falling against her shoulder as she walks us through the castle. I keep my hands tucked tightly between my thighs and my mind throbbing with a migraine that matches the discomfort of my flesh.

She doesn't say a word, even when she finally reaches the common area and enters my personal bedroom. She simply walks me to my bed, lays me down against the soft mattress and turns on her heels. As she moves back toward my door, my heart hammers wildly and disappointment stings my eyes while I watch her departing frame.

"Tomorrow morning, you'll arrive for meals with the other girls. Follow their lead, pay attention, they'll show you how it is to be done. I will meet you there and we'll continue training in the evening." She instructs me without any tone of expectations or excitement. Of course not; the words are flat and monotone, a literal manuscript of verbiage meant to do nothing but educate me.

And then she shuts the door behind her without another word, leaving me in the darkness and pain of what my life has become.

CHAPTER NINE

NA'AMAH

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

What do I need right now? Anything, fucking anything. I need to feed, I need to fuck, I need to taste her blood.

Her blood.

Skilla's.

It's magnetic. I try to play it off so easily as if she means nothing to me. Because she doesn't—she can't. She's exactly like every other girl I've broken before. She fucking has to be.

But everything feels differently this time. Each caress she leaves on my skin, every mark I stain hers with. Shit, even the sound of her tiny breaths as she gasps and cries out when I touch her.

It's as if every single aspect of her entire being was designed for me. And it's only been what, 48 hours since I met her in that club? Two goddamn days and I'm already feeling this out of control? I should have never touched her like I did in her room, I shouldn't of done it tonight when I caught her sneaking around the Throne Room either. Her punishments have nothing to do with sex at the moment, and yet that's tied into the fucking air I breathe when I'm around her.

"Brielle," I whisper the word knowing I shouldn't succumb to this. But I can't help it, I need to eat, because it's the only logical reason I can explain the ways I'm so out of control with Skilla. I'm just hungry, that's all. Brielle shouldn't be the girl I go to, but as I shut the door to Skilla's room behind me, my body is instantly drawn to Brielle.

I can feel how restless she is, it's in her blood.

With each girl I train, I build a connection to. I'm in tune with their emotional state, their needs, I can sense their blood easily and when it comes to water, I can breach their thoughts for the most part.

I can't read minds, not like Aggie. But water carries memory, and while my abilities lie in frost and ice, they are based in water. I can at least draw very specific, detailed intentions on thoughts and emotions.

For me, the connection I build with them is easily broken, quickly transferred to Lilith once she takes over in owning these girls. They all belong to her anyways, but I know Brielle has been her biggest struggle in finding a connection to. Because of this, her submissive tether hasn't been fully transferred to Lilith yet.

I quietly step up to her door and knock, knowing full well she's already awake and waiting for me. Turning the knob, I move inside, taking note of the lights being off and the silence in her space.

"I was hoping you'd come," her soft voice whispers in the darkness, a plea of her pleasing nature woven into her tone. "I've missed you."

I sigh, my heart sinking at her admission and yet my fangs drop at the familiarity of her near blood. "Brielle," I reply, keeping my voice void of the commanding nature. I try not to step into that role immediately with her, reminding her that she no longer belongs to me.

"Please," she begs, and the whimper in her voice raises every red flag inside of me. I shouldn't be using her for this, I should choose someone else. But damn, she's convenient, and I know how badly she wants this from me.

"You know we can't do it like that," I tell her, this time unable to hide the subtle tinge of authority in my words. I move closer to her and my eyes adjust immediately to the darkness, finding her exactly as I imagined she'd be.

On her knees, sitting back, her hands resting in her lap and her head tilted down so she isn't looking at me.

Each one of them has a different variation of the same submissive pose. I change them slightly to fit each specific girl, in whichever way I feel is intimate to their nature.

Skilla keeps her hands laced behind her head because she needs to lose complete control in this environment. I have a feeling, when it comes to her step-brother, she is forced into a position of authority in ways she never wanted. The things he was making her say the night I found her, the

ways he was forcing her touch him—being out of control will be the key to her submission.

Brielle is quiet as it is, but her attitude gets the best of her. If she's cornered or feels like her territory is being stepped into—she snaps. A downward gaze and laced hands in her lap keeps her humble.

I crouch down in front of her, lifting my fingers to her chin and tilting her head up toward me. "Look at me," I say, fully recognizing this is the second biggest mistake I've made tonight. "I need to feed."

Her eyes widen with a sense of gratitude, I can feel it emanating from her frame. Her chest swells and she straightens her shoulders just a bit. "Always, Alca." She immediately responds, tilting her head and lifting her hands to gather her long hair over one shoulder.

My eyes fall to the thick vein pulsing on the side of her throat. Fuck, she's irresistible at this point. Her blood floods my senses like a drug. "Na'amah or Queen, remember? You cannot call me Alca any longer." I try to remind her gently but fuck, the closer I am to her, the hungrier I become with her vein so readily available.

I need to slow down.

Gently, she sits up on her knees, leaning forward as the thin fabric of her camisole dips over her chest. My eyes fall to her round tits, swaying just slightly with the movement while her tight nipples peek through the light cotton. Her hands move to the back of my neck as she tugs me closer, and I try for a moment to slow us down in this way.

I just need to feed; we don't have to fuck.

But I already know what The Bite elicits from humans. It's such an intoxicating experience, one that completely enraptures every ounce of their identity. It's addicting, the high you encounter as we taste their blood. My fangs sinking into her skin, the instant sharp pain flooded with a euphoric drug that makes her feel invincible.

Desired.

Wanted.

Transcendent.

You're taken so wildly high, you never want to come down. Humans who do not carry celestial blood often die from the initial Bite, or become so addicted they get involved with the wrong Vampires and are sucked completely dry.

I lean in, my eyes focused on the sweet spot I've come to know she loves at the base of her throat. I lift my hand at first, sweeping my thumb along her soft creamy skin, imagining the initial pierce of my fangs when she gasps and grips me tightly. Then the flood of blood on my tongue. Fucking hot, sweet, with a lacing of individuality from Brielle herself. Each of them tastes slightly different, notes of their personalities woven into their DNA.

I hear her gasp as I brush my lips against her skin, aching deep inside to taste her blood and drink. It's in my fucking bones, the desperation I have to feed right now. It's like being around Skilla made me even hungrier, even more derailed mentally and physically than I usually am.

The craving need I have for blood draws me mentally toward Skilla though—she's the one I want to indulge in right now.

But I'll have to settle from this, and hopefully it quenches my thirst like I need it too.

My tongue slips out and across her heated flesh, moving over her collar bone as the onslaught of emotions and thoughts from Brielle whip through me. Sweat beads along her jaw line as she breathes in deeply, arching her back and pressing her chest against mine as my hands move over her body. One weaves into her hair, instinctually shifting her head and elongating her neck into a position that's easiest for me to feed. The other grips her hip and pulls her onto my lap as I sit back on the floor of her room. She straddles my waist, her fingers shifting over the shaved sides of my head before slipping over the knotted portion of my hair.

She wants to pull it out, I already know. She's tried to countless times before—but I never let her. I never let my hair down, it's a piece of my vulnerability I'm unwilling to share with anyone. When it's tied up, it's a component of my armor, my walls. Pulled back tightly and secured on top of my head, it's become an integral part of my appearance. I'm quick to grip her wrist and stop the action, and I don't miss her disappointed sigh once I do it. The hunger inside of me grows restless, the beast in my blood awakening and impatient to be released.

She surrenders easily and I get the feeling that she's settling just as I am. I'll take what I can get from her, because I can't get it from Skilla. And she'll accept anything I'm willing to give, even though it's not as much as she'd like. So, we dance along this line, toeing further and further while I distract myself with her blood, and she loses herself in my touch.

My hand slides up her spine, my fingers pressing into her hot skin and slipping under the thin nightgown she has on. I grip the fabric roughly, yanking it up her soft thighs and ass and pulling it over her head. I drop it to the ground, and she's completely naked on top of me. Her long, golden hair has fallen around her shoulders, and I wrap it around my fist as I continue creating the most efficient space for me to feed. My nails scrape along her back and I feel her roll her hips against mine as she quickly begins unraveling.

I drag the tips of my fangs along her skin, tasting the salt and heat as it shifts to the surface. She's absolutely soaked, I'm positive, and I can't help but want to feel for myself as she grinds against me. So, I drop my hand for a quick moment, shifting it between us and sliding my knuckles through her pussy. My thumb slips up and over her clit for a moment, and the immediate moan falling from her lips is filled with relief and satisfaction.

She moves against my hand and I continue touching her, circling her clit and sliding down until I can push inside her tight pussy. She's slick and needy, whimpering against the crease of my shoulder while she rolls into my touch. "No one touches me like you do," she whispers against me, just as I slip inside and pull back out. Slow and deep, I move inside her, feeling her arousal slick my own fingers with every single thrust.

I fucking love it.

I'm eager to sink my fangs into her throat so I can feed and fuck her at the same time.

But her words trigger something inside of me as well, an alert I should be addressing in this moment instead of what I'm doing. I can't stop this though, my own hunger and desire overriding my logical decisions tonight.

Her hands run over my chest, desperate to touch me more than she is in this moment. But I don't allow anyone to fuck me, no one pleases me, no one undresses me. I am in control of every aspect of this, and it helps to break the bond once Lilith builds a true, emotional connection to them. Those relationships are reciprocal. They feed Lilith, but they make love in a far different way than I do.

Brielle wants more with me, and I will never give her what she truly needs.

“Slow down,” I tell her, pulling free of her cunt and gripping her wandering hands as they attempt lifting my shirt. “You know that’s not how this works.”

Her head falls to my shoulder in disappointment as I listen to her heavy breaths, her skin is flushed as my tongue presses against her vein. I thrive here, in this exact fucking moment, right before I give her the Bite, seconds before her blood floods my mouth and intoxicates me. I want to drown in these very instances, the anticipation is something else entirely, and I’m addicted to it just as much the blood itself.

I feel her tense, the knowing she has in feeling my fangs tempt her flesh. She can sense it coming, and her fingers tighten their hold as she wraps her arm around the back of my neck and readies herself.

It all happens in an instant, quick and immediate when my own grip roughly stills her movements and my other hand cinches her to me by tightly wrapping around her waist. I launch forward, my hunger finally breaking free and exploding within me. My fangs drop even farther, my tongue slipping across their tips just before I sink them into her throat.

She gasps, her hold digging into my flesh for the briefest moment before she completely falls apart in my arms. Her blood is thick and heady, filling my mouth while my tongue presses her vein to encourage the easy flow. I suck, hard and fast while my hands roam over her body and release her hair. She’s moaning against me, high on the euphoric elation The Bite brings. I move my hand back down to her slick pussy, sliding through her until I push two fingers inside.

She cries out, grinding her core against my hand while I pull out and thrust back inside her, slow at first, until I’m picking up the pace and drinking her essence at the same time.

These feeding sessions never last long, it’s a fine line I tread while I drink. I have to pay attention to the rhythm of her pulse, and slow down when I feel the slightest hesitancy in her heartbeat. But I’m dying to take more of her, and the slightest change in her blood when someone comes is a facet I look forward to. It isn’t necessary, but I’m fucking her anyway and I’d love to taste that burst of sweetness inside her.

So, I flip us forward and drop her to the ground below. I’m hovering over her, my fangs still locked in her vein as I swallow everything she’s offering me. Her legs spread wide beneath me, her back arching off the

ground as her tits move against mine. Her nipples are hard, and I let my hand roll one between my fingers as I work her closer to a release.

She's begging to come in my ear, her words muffled and slow as she speaks through the drunken haze. God, she's almost there, and I notice the quick change her pulse a moment later. I pick up my pace on her core, fucking her hard and fast as I do the opposite with my thirst. I slow down my hold on her vein, savoring the flavor of her blood while coming to the end of my feed.

"Come for me, Brielle," I pull out of her throat momentarily and speak the command immediately, knowing she's still lingering in the submissive space with me. My thumb works over her clit, circling and pressing down while my fingers continue pumping inside her. But I pierce my fangs in her once again, knowing what I'm about to taste and craving that last bit of sweetness.

The permission is all she needs to break completely. She falls apart, her nails digging into my arms and clinging tightly as she rides out the orgasm whipping through her. The explosion flares through her blood, singing and dancing on my tongue in a wild fusion of pleasure. I lap it up, drowning myself in the satisfaction of feeding and savoring every ounce of her.

Finally, I sit back just slightly, pulling my slick fingers from her core and lifting them to my mouth. I drag my thumb along the edge of my lip, sweeping across the stained crimson and bringing it to my tongue. I taste her in so many ways, in her cum and in her blood on my flesh. I savor the remnants of her on my fangs before they ascend back into my mouth, tucked away now that my hunger has been satiated.

Brielle remains on the ground; her eyes have slipped shut and a sweet smile lingers on her lips. I move forward, pulling her into my arms and lifting her onto her bed. She's absolutely entranced with the Bite and I know she'll sleep this off until morning. But as soon as her head hits the pillow, her hand darts for my own, pulling me closer as she quickly presses her lips against mine.

I'm caught off guard initially, because I don't ever kiss the girls after they've bonded to Lilith and I use my hands to gently push her back. She resists at first, but the hazy high she's riding overthrows her need to fight this in the moment. "Alca..." she whispers as her eyes drift shut and her hands fall beside her head.

My heart sinks, my gut twisting in guilt as I pull the heavy blanket up and over her frame. I know she's cold, even with the heat of her arousal and the Bite. I can't help it. I carry a chill with me in every touch that no doubt radiates through the physical brush of my hand against her skin.

I step back once she's truly fallen asleep, watching as her chest rises and falls with each breath. Now that I'm not strung out on the debilitating pain of hunger, my mind begins running through every occurrence of tonight.

Finding Skilla in the Throne Room. Punishing her and working her toward an orgasm without release once again. The marks I've surely left on her body and the ways she was clearly in pain when I brought her to her room not long ago.

Feeding from Brielle, fucking her. The ways she's called me Alca tonight and all of the mistakes I've very stupidly made with both of them.

I'm feeling things I shouldn't be. Skilla is weaving her way into my head, into my hunger, and I've never experienced a draw to someone like I do with her.

How the fuck am I supposed to handle this all correctly?

Maybe I should abandon this training with Skilla—take her back to her home and leave her there without a word. This seems too dangerous to continue, and there's no way in Hell I'm losing myself, my identity to the lust filled crave I have for her blood.

No fucking way.

CHAPTER TEN

Skilla

The sun shines through my window in streaks of harsh, bright light piercing my eyelids.

I don't find comfort in the daytime...not here.

Squeezing my eyes shut tightly, I lift my palms and run them over my face, absently hoping this shakes the heavy sleep residing in my bones. God, I don't want to wake up. The morning brings an onslaught of new problems, unresolved emotions and painful reminders of where I am and what's happened to me.

Like a flash flood, the thoughts spiral and cascade into a whirlwind of anxious energy inside of me. Suddenly sleep is so far away, so impossible to catch I know I won't be able to find it again. So, I sit up instead, using my muscles to pull me upwards in a way that never had me second guessing my physical discomfort until right this very second.

A deep, achy pain shoots through me. In every fucking direction. My ass is sore, spreading up my back and down over my thighs. I groan as I pull myself upwards, confusion running through my head at what could have made me *this* uncomfortable.

Memories flash through my head, the dark room Na'amah trapped me in, the ways my hands were tied up above my head, the fucking flog. The icy touch. The near orgasm.

All of it. It quickly plays like a loop inside my mind, over and over again while my emotions ride the rollercoaster of repetition.

But even still, I'm far more sore and in pain than I would have expected. She hit me, she tied me up, but as I shift the blanket and look

over my thighs and lower stomach, I notice various streaks of blue under my flesh like veins. I lift my trembling fingers and run them softly over the lines, bewilderment washing over me as I try to understand what's happened.

Fuck, I can almost feel them. Like there's genuinely something underneath my fucking skin where she's touched me. I panic, my heart thundering loudly in my chest as I leap from my bed and move toward the large mirror on one side of my room.

But the steps alone are painful, and I slow my movements in order to ease the ache. Twisting in the mirror, I inspect my body, finding these markings all over my entire frame. They spread wide over my ass and up my spine, covering my thighs completely and even branch over my core.

"What the hell?" I stammer, a sudden fear building in my chest at what I'm seeing. What's happening to me? What does this mean? And will these last forever, will the ache in every step remain permanent?

Tears spring to my eyes, threatening to spill free while I force them back. My heart is racing, my skin turning clammy and pulling tight in wake of my paralyzing confusion. "No, no, no," I begin repeating the word over and over again, turning back and forth in the mirror while I rub my hands over my thighs. Maybe I can massage them away, maybe I can force them out of me.

These kind of marks are unlike anything I've experienced before, and suddenly the fear and unsettled energy inside me is breaking my mental stability and ability to logically process this. A panic swells in my stomach, and I begin using my finger nails to scratch roughly at my skin over the blue streaks.

I fall to the ground, hitting hard with a thump while those tears finally escape and spill over my cheeks. Hot streams of salt slip over my lips and coat my tongue while I dig and dig and dig at these marks. "Go away," I mutter through clenched teeth, fighting the urge not to find something sharp and pierce my own flesh myself. "Get the fuck out of me!" My voice raises uncontrollably, but I hardly notice it. I definitely don't care how loud I'm being and I'm lost in full abandonment as the confusion and dread take control of my every action.

My skin is turning red, broken blood vessels springing to the forefront, but the marks don't go away. They remain perfectly intact, if anything they're darkening with the surrounding blood spilling around them. I whip

my head to the side, surrendering to the idea that maybe I can push something underneath them and find exactly what they are. Searching the room, I shift to my hands and knees and crawl to the dresser beside me, yanking open every drawer so quickly that one falls out and hits the ground loudly.

My breaths are coming so rapidly I can hardly catch up, and suddenly I'm feeling like I'm actually failing at inhaling despite the gasps escaping my mouth. My throat constricts, vines of fear and discomfort are wrapping tightly around me. Breathing becomes nearly impossible, and I quickly twist around on my ass as I lean back against the disheveled dresser.

Those hot tears continue falling, now soaking my chest as it heaves up and down. Before I even realize what's happening, I catch the door to my room swinging wide open and a smattering of footsteps rushing in to my space. I want to tell whoever it is to leave, especially if it's fucking Na'amah, but I can't even speak, my words catching in my sealed throat and refusing release.

"Breathe," a voice speaks out around me, that vintage honeyed sparking something familiar in my mind. When I lift my eyes they meet hers, dark and brown with tiny streaks of gold around the edges. "Come on now, you're okay. Breathe, Skilla. We'll help you." Soft hands run over my upper arms, and I vaguely register that I'm still completely naked.

Soothing, comforting, kind. Her touch carries a far different feeling than what I've experienced so far.

A shift occurs inside my chest, a clinging need to bask in whatever kindness I can find here.

My frantic gaze drops to my thighs and darts back up to hers. Concern and fear contorts my face into pinched brows and wide eyes. "These marks," I stutter, scratching my fingers hastily along the blue streaks once again. Her hands quickly reach forward and grip my wrists, attempting to hold me in place when I try pulling out of her hold. "I have to get rid of them," I tell her, my voice hitching in the obvious alarm controlling my actions.

"Don't—" she starts, yanking my hands up and away from my own skin. She quickly stops talking though, and I assume it's because I'm fighting back against her control so much. Another girl rushes into the room and crouches on her knees next to this one. I believe it's Fira and Sera, if I'm remembering their names correctly. Sera, with her long blonde

hair twisted up on top of her head, leans forward to assist Fira in holding me still. But while Fira restrains my hands, Sera runs her fingers over my shoulders, gripping tightly while also running her thumbs in comforting patterns along my skin.

“Don’t scratch them, they’ll go away on their own.” Fira explains further, finally having a moment to actually speak now that Sera is helping her.

“They aren’t permanent. It’s just Na’amah’s way of marking you during your time with her. She can’t help it, really.” Sera speaks this time, her voiced carrying attributes of comfort and peace. I slow my fight, finding their calm nature beneficial to my own nerves. Their energy reeks of content and unity and I get the strangest feeling that maybe... just maybe they actually want to be here.

For some reason, I find comfort in that and I quietly hope there is a kind of freedom in being here. *If I can never escape that is.*

“When? When will they go away?” I ask immediately, desperate to remove myself from this physical association with Na’amah. I’m angry with her, absolutely livid for the ways she’s treated me since we met. Her brief slips of humanity are easily destroyed by her continuous shitty control.

“A day or so, as long as you don’t have another session with her before then,” Fira offers her hand to me after releasing my wrists, standing and pulling me up alongside her. “Heat, that will help with muscle aches. Haven’t you noticed how cold they are? The marks I mean.”

Cold? No. I hadn’t noticed, but I look down and run my fingers along them again, focusing on the temperature of my skin in those places. Fuck, they are cold. I guess the constant heat of anxiety and panic washing through me masked the chill they clearly carry.

“I—No, no. I hadn’t noticed.” *Fuck, I need to my shit together.*

Finally, everything in me starts to calm, my breaths steady, my heart rate slows and my mind clears just a bit. At least I know this is normal in this realm of completely absurdity.

“They’ll go away, don’t worry. You’ll learn to adjust to the pain, and once you’ve bonded with Lilith, you won’t have these marks any longer. Her powers aren’t rooted in ice, which is what Na’amah inflicts when she touches you.” Sera steps past me and begins fixing the mess I’ve made with my dresser. Fira follows suit and reaches in to pull out a new set of

clothes for me. It looks like a pair of black leggings and a slouchy blue sweatshirt, she turns and lays them on my bed, moving toward the door with Sera once I've clearly calmed.

"Thank you," I reply, processing the explanation she's given me regarding these streaks. "I appreciate the help, and the answers. More than you know."

"We do know though; we know exactly how you feel right now. We've all been through it, we've survived. You will too." Sera smiles sweetly, and Fira leans against my door frame with her arms crossed over her chest. Her round tits spill slightly from the lace bralette she's wearing, all in black while Sera dons a similar top in white.

"Get dressed and meet us out here. We'll walk you down to the hall for breakfast." Fira's voice is kind, but I can tell she holds a bit of a spark Sera doesn't. She seems like the sassier one of the two, the one who doesn't take as much shit as the others—or maybe deals the shit most. Either way, she seems genuine, and I appreciate the both of them for stepping in to help when I'm so lost here. "Also, just a heads up—things won't get easier here. They'll get harder first, until you surrender to your Alca completely. Until you've bonded with her, she'll push and push and push and it won't be fucking pleasant."

Sera glances toward Fira and then strangely looks behind them, her eyes lingering on something before turning back toward me. I'm listening to them while I dress, sliding the leggings slowly over my pained skin and pulling the top over my head. "What is that supposed to mean? How much worse can it get than this?" I question, confused as to what else I can anticipate.

"She only means it's a journey, being here that is. Your relationship with Na'amah. Giving up the life you had before this. None of us thought we'd be here, but it's good once you make it through." Sera steps in this time, sharing a different perspective than what it feels like Fira was trying to say.

I scoff though, because how in the hell can she say this is all *good*?

"I know, I know. You don't believe it until you experience it., Even if I tell you everything you're feeling is worth it, what you're about to go through is worth it." Sera lifts her hands and absently adjusts her hair, possibly a nervous tick as she speaks to me.

Fira looks at her though, narrowing her eyes and standing up straight in the doorway next to her. “Don’t over sell it, Sera,” she bites, her tone turning sharp and strange between them.

Sera watches her silently and I can’t help but wonder what’s going on between them. She moves to lift a hand and reach for Fira’s arm, but she’s quicker and intentionally steps away and out of her reach. “Don’t.” Fira says quietly, and the hurt in her voice is both evident and intriguing.

Fira turns to me one last time before leaving. “Try not to kill Brielle today.”

My brows dip in complete and utter perplexity. “I don’t even know her,” I start, but Fira’s mouth quirks up in a knowing grin, as if she’s aware of something I’m not. Sera’s gaze drops to the floor and I watch as she twirls her fingers in front of her waist.

“Focus on your breathing. When everything feels like it’s falling apart, when your emotions begin to get the best of you, focus on your breaths and her chill. I know it sounds strange, but as you connect more with her, you’ll be able to feel her in different places around the kingdom without actually being near her. Especially with those marks, you’ll learn to appreciate them and what they offer you when you’re feeling most alone.” Sera speaks with her head turned downward and I listen to her intently. I’m not sure why she’s avoiding my glances, but my heart spikes in curiosity as to what could have happened with the girl I haven’t officially met.

“I can’t imagine connecting with her like that.” I speak honestly, my voice shifting quiet and uncomfortable.

“How can you not? Tell me right now you feel nothing when she’s near you.” Fira hasn’t left yet, and now her words are forcing me to face truths I may not be ready to admit to just yet.

“I feel plenty when I’m around her—anger, resentment, loathing,” I quip, going defensive against whatever she’s alluding to.

“And?” She pushes, stepping back into the room and coming closer to me as I lean back against my bed. “Be honest with yourself. Don’t fucking hide behind those negative emotions. It’s easy to stay distracted when you’re angry.”

I pause, refusing to admit to what she’s saying. Even while my mind flashes to the moments I’m drawn to Na’amah. The quick touches and heady words when it feels like she’s giving into something she shouldn’t

be. All the times she's shown bits of possession and the ways in which my body easily and wantonly responds to her.

When I'm wet, when she's taking control and touching me like she owns me.

I have moments when that is exactly what I want, when she's fulfilling desires inside of me I never realized were so hungry.

"That's what I thought," Fira states confidently, turning on her heels and striding out of the room. "Now come on, it's time to eat."

I don't speak, instead I sit in what she's said, knowing that in several ways she's absolutely right. I'm struggling to understand what that exactly means for me.

Each step out of my room and into the common area is filled with a blunt pain. But slowly it gets easier to manage, not disappearing completely, but hitting in duller waves as my body heats up and moves more. It seems as though everyone else is already gone, and I walk in-between both Sera and Fira as we make our way downstairs and through a separate hallway to our left that I haven't been down before.

It looks the same as all the others, covered in torches with purple flames and a mix of both iron and wooden doors on either side of me.

We don't talk as we walk, and the silence feels heavy and thick amongst the three of us. I can't shake the feeling that I'm about to walk into something awful, and the echoed steps off our feet leave eerie shivers running up my spine.

I tuck my arms around my chest, feeling the familiar cold breeze as we meet the end of the hall. Other scents waft through my nose, and I tilt my chin up as I breathe in and recognize an array of comforting foods.

Eggs, bacon, something sweet and syrupy.

My stomach rumbles audibly, and Sera glances over to me with a nervous look lingering on her features.

"Can you tell me what is going on?" I ask quietly, frustration looming in my mind at the fact that they haven't told me what to expect here.

"Remember to breathe. Focus on the feeling of her ice under your sk—" Sera speaks quickly, and my eyes narrow while my brows draw together as I watch her. But suddenly, something tall and hard slams directly into my chest, and I'm caught off guard as I fall back on my ass before I have the chance to catch myself.

I quickly look up, my eyes colliding with Brielle's as she glares down at me. I can almost swear her nose is tilted straight up to the fucking ceiling, even though her gaze remains on me. I'd say the heat radiating off of her is practically tangible, but it's actually the very clear and obvious ice I feel so strongly from her first.

That's when my eyes catch something entirely different and yet all too disgustingly familiar at the same time.

Small, tiny streaks of blue peek out the top of her cream sweater, cracking along her throat and over her sharp jawline.

My heart beat speeds up uncontrollably, my breath catching in my throat as I begin putting the pieces together.

I didn't see those marks yesterday when I first saw Brielle in the common room. The girls said I'd have these for a day or two if I didn't have another session with Na'amah before then. They'd disappear after that...

But that would mean Brielle would have been with her recently, either before or after Na'amah was with me last night.

A sour and gut-wrenching feeling rips through my stomach and chest. My heart spikes and my belly heaves as vomit threatens to rise up my throat.

I shouldn't care. Not at all. I should not give a single shit about this. But my body is reacting too viscerally, so aggressively, that I'm struggling to hold myself back from showing my emotions completely.

"Breathe," Sera drops to her knees in order to help me up. Her voice is so quiet only I can hear her. But it doesn't help, not really, the jealousy grows and spirals until it feels as though it's snaking over my throat and eluding my vision completely. All I can see are those familiar streaks running over her skin, and as they disappear under her blouse, I can imagine where else they've marked her.

"Don't need to," I bite out, not caring to keep my voice down as I move to stand back up on my feet. My eyes meet Brielle's directly as I stand up against her. I may not verbalize exactly what I'm feeling, but I'll be damned if she thinks she has any sort of effect on me. Her or Na'amah.

Where the hell is she, by the way? My mind wanders absently to the idea that she spent the night in Brielle's room. That they slept together. That they are more than the subsequent dominant/submissive roles Na'amah has made me believe she only participates in.

I stalk past Brielle without a word, Sera and Fira follow suit, and it's when I enter the large room ahead of me that I find all the others gathered together.

The room is draped in all four colors of the queens, velvet cascades from the ceilings and a beautifully intricate and elaborate chandelier hangs from above us. All four colors are painted around it; stunning depictions of what I assume each of their powers must be. I only guess that because the blue portions resemble snow and ice. Giants wisps of snowflakes and shards of frozen crystals are embellished perfectly in various shades of blue.

My eyes dance over the other sections, curiously trying to decipher what each of the other Queen's are capable of. But my attention is pulled quickly when the sound of Na'amah's voice cuts through my focus.

"Skilla," she starts, and my eyes dart to the other side of the room where I find her standing at the head of a long, dark oak table. Four chairs are lined on both sides, with a single larger, seat stationed at the head. The expanse is covered in an array of breakfast foods. It's practically a feast for everyone involved. Large platters and trays are scattered across the center and each of the girls I've met so far are milling about at their seats in order to dish their own plates and begin eating.

Jesus fuck. As if everything in this place is goddamn normal. As if they haven't been abducted and abused and kept here without their consent?

I don't understand it.

My eyes narrow at the sound of my name coming from her lips, a spark of outrage blooms in my chest at the simple sight of her. Flashes from last night flood my mind and I physically force the lump growing in my throat back down and meet her hard gaze.

"Sit." One word. Her voice. A tone of demand and authority.

God, it feels like I'm the only person in this room who doesn't have a choice. Her eyes drop to the sit beside hers and her head tilts that way for a moment before turning back to me.

"No thanks," I reply, and I don't think she misses the air of sarcasm in my voice. "I'd rather sit with Sera."

"No she wouldn't," Sera immediately chimes in, and I look to her as betrayal stings my skin. Her eyes soften as she glances at me, but she stays steady in her decision to push me toward Na'amah. She steps closer for

only a moment as she whispers under her breath, “Don’t fight this. I promise it’ll be easier if you just surrender.”

I don’t know why, but hell it makes me even angrier that this is what she’s encouraging. How? When the hell did they decide it would be better to live this life, than to fight for their freedom? “Never,” I snap back, and then face Na’amah’s gaze once again. My eyes rake over her tall figure, her powerful arms crossed tightly over her chest. Her round tits spilling over just slightly, enough to have my eyes falling for the briefest moment before I drop lower over her waist.

I’d like to say watching her like this has no effect on me, but even in the midst of my anger, I can feel this icy tether growing stronger between the two of us. My fight is twofold, working against this unnatural draw to her essence while pushing away from the constraints this life is now tying me down in.

Her small waist flares out over her narrow hips and my gaze lingers on the way her black, leather pants cling tightly to her incredibly strong thighs. Ah fuck, those thighs and legs. It’s downright ridiculous how attractive she is, and how her attitude does nothing to distract from that.

But I shake the draw off my shoulders and meet her look of authority once again. Her snow white hair is tied up like usual on top of her head. Only this time, there is a braid starting at the front and weaving her hair all the way back into that knot, her sides are shaved close all the way around, with those intricate designs of snow somehow cut into the design as well.

Strangely, I’m frozen in place for a moment, a blast of her chill suddenly rolling through the marks she’s left on my skin. It’s like I can feel her all of a sudden, buried within my flesh even though she hasn’t moved a single inch since I stepped into this room. Her gaze darkens and her lips part only slightly, and the tension between us grows thick and heavy as I force my breaths to maintain a consistent pace.

Moments from last night uncontrollably rise to the surface of my mind and I’m locked in the reminders of her fingers on my skin, in between my legs, and tying me up in the darkness.

“Fuck, fuck. Don’t even go there,” I mutter to myself, assuming no one can hear me. But the slight uptick of Na’amah’s lips has me terrified that she somehow did. I take a step to the side, closer to Sera when my legs

instantly pound in pain. I cry out, loudly, in front of everyone, and stumble just slightly while I attempt straightening up again.

My fingers grip my thighs in the same moment, confusion rushing through me at the sudden onslaught of pain. They were feeling better, so I don't understand what could have happened to—

"I said, sit, Kitten," Na'amah speaks again, her voice dropping a decibel and keeping that monotone tenor as she watches me. My eyes snap to hers, and I swear I can feel the pulsing of her essence beating in my own skin.

What the hell?

"Did you just—" I start, my voice much quieter than I intend, but I can't help it. I'm so caught off guard and mildly embarrassed by both my own show of weakness and the fact that Na'amah just called me fucking Kitten in front of everyone.

Na'amah steps away from the table, slowly and deliberately as she turns to the left. She walks all the way around the large expanse, while each of the girls present remain silent and unmoving. They all watch, their intense gazes burning holes all over my body as I try to stay strong and appear brave in this moment.

But my heart is thundering in my chest, my skin is pulling tight as sweat beads along my forehead and my mind races with every possible outcome this could lead to.

The air drops a few more degrees, with every step she takes toward me, I grow colder. Soon however, she's towering over me, and I tilt my chin up as I meet her gaze in front of everyone watching.

It's her energy that terrifies me though, because even as I struggle to remain present and confident here, she doesn't even look phased. She doesn't seem thrown off in the slightest, as if my presence is a mere inconvenience to her unmatched power and capabilities.

Her hand suddenly darts forward and fingers wrap fiercely around my throat. She squeezes, and every ounce of strength I had vanishes as her ice quickly spills through her marks on my skin and in the air around us. I'm completely aghast when I realize she's affecting more than my inner self. In actuality, shards of ice instantly whip past my face and frame, I head them slice through the air and puncture the wall at my back.

Crashes fall from behind me, what sounds like glass spilling onto the stone ground below. I gasp, my hands flying up to wrap tightly around

Na'amah's wrist. Her face doesn't alter for a moment, while mine is twisting in my lack of oxygen and the sheer panic exploding in my veins. I gasping as she lifts me up just slightly, my toes scrambling to touch the ground similarly to how they were last night.

Last night.

How can I even think of that while all of this is happening? But it's continuous, even having her hands on me now, her cold skin against my heat, are reminders of all the different things she can make me feel in such small amounts of time.

"Sit where you are told to sit. Do what you are told to do. Speak when you are told to speak," she states flatly, all emotion completely void of her nature as she watches me. I can't breathe, and my fingers are digging into her flesh as I try to pry her away from me. "It's simple, truly. Do you need an example of what a good girl does when she belongs to me?"

Something otherworldly unleashes in my blood, a feeling much more toxic than jealousy and one that resonates deeper than even in my blood. No, this is viscerally potent, and the idea of seeing anyone else in this space with Na'amah shocks me to my core. I can't even believe how my body is reacting now, and I vaguely wonder if these marks, of my moments with her already, have made me far more attached than I even realized before now.

I don't respond, because I still can't breathe and truthfully, I think she wants to push me like this. Her fingers tighten only briefly, cutting off my ability to make a single sound when she suddenly releases her grip and I fall to the floor. Her dark and sadistic eyes remain glued to me as she speaks next, and the name she voices is no surprise to me.

"Brielle." That dominant tone is perfectly evident, and my heart sinks to my stomach as I work to catch my breath. I hear the painful sound of a chair scraping across the floor, and the quick taps her light feet as she hurries around the room to Na'amah.

"Yes, Alca," her voice is immediate and submissive as she comes to stand just behind my captor. But there's a lacing of desire, of passion in her words as she speaks to her. She's so fucking eager it makes me sick.

With jealousy, or disgust, I don't know. But I refuse to acknowledge that.

"Show Skilla what it means to belong to me, to submit as she should now that this is her new life." She turns to her, reaching those strong

fingers that were touching me just moments ago toward Brielle. With a much softer, kinder hold, she pulls Brielle in front of her, placing her in front of her chest and then weaving her arms gently around her waist.

Brielle melts in her embrace, easing back until her head is falling against Na'amah's shoulder and her hands remain at her sides. My tormentor continues touching her, running her hands over her stomach and down her thighs as I watch Brielle's breath begin coming in quick and unsteady.

Na'amah's eyes are on me, and her lips part just enough for me to see her fangs drop in her mouth. It's light in here, and it's the first time I visibly see them so unobscured in front of me. My eyes widen at the sight of those sharp, white points now scraping over her thick lower lip. I'm absolutely entranced by them, my eyes glued to her movements before I even realize what she's doing.

Brielle's breaths become even more rapid, her fingers tightening into fists at her side as if she knows she isn't allowed to touch Na'amah back. But she's relishing in her hold, and the soft whimper falling from her mouth has my eyes snapping in her direction. Her face is completely euphoric, and she tilts her head to the side as if she's offering her neck to Na'amah.

It takes a moment for me to understand what I'm seeing, but as Na'amah's hand slides up her stomach and slowly over her tits, her thumb slipping over her clearly stiff nipples and then around her throat when I notice the marks I didn't pick up on before. It's now, when her neck is completely elongated, when her blouse has slipped off her shoulder just a bit, that I see two puncture wounds at the base of her throat, small and pink around the edges.

"Feed me like you did last night, my girl," Na'amah whispers quietly against her skin, dragging the tips of her fangs over the side of her throat before closing her lips and kissing her.

"Focus, Skilla," I absently hear the sound of what I think is Fira's voice bedside me but my mind is practically void of anything aside from what I'm watching take place right in front of me. An intense need to rip Brielle away from Na'amah builds in my stomach, and my logical mind is screaming at me to close my fucking eyes and not watch this.

But I can't, and tears shockingly spring forward when I see Na'amah's tongue slip out and slide across the marks her teeth undoubtedly left on

her last night.

“Always, Alca,” Brielle submits, gathering her hair and pulling it to the side so she can offer her vein completely.

I hate her. I loathe the both of them separately and together, and my nails claw into the ground below me while I try to detach myself from what’s happening.

“Wait,” I speak the word frantically, my mind and body shifting into something of survival rather than logic. A space I believe I’ll become familiar with...one that will soon be my friend rather than foe if I remain here.

But it’s too late, and in the next instant I excruciatingly watch as Na’amah’s hand fiercely grips Brielle’s jaw as she twists her head to the side and her sharp fangs pierce deeply into the base of her throat. Brielle cries out at the same time, her hands flying up as one wraps around Na’amah’s wrist and the other fervently holds the back of her neck. She pulls her affectionately against her as she drinks, and I watch as thin streams of blood suddenly escape Na’amah’s lips and slip down over Brielle’s collarbone.

I break apart at the sight of them together. There’s no excuse, no logical reasoning behind this that could explain the absolutely intrinsic reaction my mind and body are experiencing now. But I can sense the shift inside of me, that tether holding me to Na’amah even when I don’t want it to, tightening and snapping at the same time. It’s alive and livid, a hurricane of betrayal billowing under my skin as my lips fall open and a visceral scream explodes from my mouth.

I lose control completely. My eyes squeeze shut as my blood boils and ripples in my flesh. My heart feels as though it stops beating entirely, and I panic when I suddenly feel my thighs tighten in what resembles physical binds of ice around my legs. Immediately, it feels as though I can’t move, but my screaming won’t stop as I lose all perception of time.

I’m stuck. Completely frozen in this moment of terror and jealousy without having any ability to escape it. My legs feel heavy and cold, and my vision goes completely black while I’m like this.

Quiet words sound in the distance, and I struggle to sift through the scream resonating in my ears and flowing through my chest in order to make them out.

“Focus on her ice, on the chill, Skilla. Remember.” Sera, I assume this time but her words make no sense as she speaks them over and over and over again. I can feel the ice binding my legs together, sitting heavy in my thighs, but it does nothing to comfort me, nothing to help me escape this terrible nightmare.

The words come louder now though, and I fight against the paralyzing hold in order to attempt doing as she says. Can I quiet the sound of my own strangled voice? I’m desperate too. Dying to escape this hold and get away from these people.

I need to be alone.

I need to be with Na’amah.

I need.

I need.

I need.

Finally, I sense the slightest crack in the frozen hold around my legs, as if something has faltered, and I focus on that sensation as I try to regain control. The chill feels even more potent now, as if the tether between myself and Na’amah has settled even a single increment into rest. It allows me the briefest instant to solidify my attention on her frost, on the sensation thing I know connects me to her.

And the subtlest sound of her breath, very suddenly in my ear, offers me the smallest shred of hope in my ability to find myself once again and calm. The reminder that I am still alive, that Na’amah is still alive, that we’re in the same space has my hands clinging forward and finally grasping her skin. I’m holding onto her forearm I believe, but my vision hasn’t cleared and everything is still dark around me.

I’m trembling though, the cold seeping into my bones and sending goosebumps all over my skin. I can feel the feel ice growing within my flesh, branching outward and covering my limbs in what I imagine is thin layer of frost.

I’m so cold. And the hands now resting on either side of my cheeks do not bring me any warmth.

Somehow that’s comforting. Because my mind lingers on her face instead. No more Brielle, no other girls, no one else.

Except me and her. The realization of that being what brings me comfort and solace in this moment is...disturbing.

“Take her to her room,” Na’amah’s pained voice breaks through my mental oasis, shattering my peace with the gravity of our situation.

“I can’t see,” I speak quickly, my voice raising an octave as fear spirals through me.

“You will,” Na’amah speaks again, but I can no longer feel her skin against mine. I can’t hear her breath in my ear, and I briefly wonder if I imagined those comforts in the first place. “Give it time, I need to put distance between us.”

“Us? You and I?” I ask, twisting my head back and forth as commotion audibly breaks around the room. I move forward onto my hands and knees, attempting to stand when Na’amah’s hands quickly grip my upper arms and catch me when I stumble in my lack of vision. She steadies me, but the sheer agonizing sting that rips through my flesh where she touches me has me rearing back away from her.

I hear her sigh out in frustration before she speaks again. She’s close, her heated voice low in my ear without touching me. “There’s too much opposing, frenetic energy between us. Distance is the only thing that will dissolve it completely.”

Confusion rushes through me, spilling out into dread as I think about being alone without my sight. Once again, the dichotomy of every decision seemingly splitting me in two.

“Don’t go,” I whisper, repeatedly closing my eyes and opening them again in hopes that it somehow works my vision back into clearer territory. “Not you.”

Na’amah is silent for a pause, so long that I think she’s actually left me while the other girls hurry around the room. But she suddenly speaks again, and the simple sound of her heady, smooth voice echos in my ears. “You are making this far harder than it’s meant to be.”

I hesitate. “What? What does that even mean?” But she’s gone. I can tell because the air around me suddenly warms ever so slightly and I hear the sound of Thalia’s kind voice as her hands wrap gently around my upper arms.

“Come with me, I’ll get you back up to your room.” She pulls on my frame and I lean into her, trusting her as she leads me out of the space and into the hallway. I follow in silence, lacing my hand through hers as I focus on staying upright with every step.

The ache of Na'amah's marks continue to persist in various places across my body. But nothing is as disoriented as my mind and my emotions. I swear, every time I'm around her, she leaves me with more questions than answers.

Once we've made it upstairs and into my room, my vision begins finally, slowly coming back to me. It's as though the farther away I got from that space, the better I began to feel. I don't understand it, and I'm eager to talk to Na'amah myself in order to find these answers.

"Sleep for a while, it'll help with the residual magic," Thalia explains as my hands reach forward and search for my bed. I find it and immediately climb on top, thankful for the feeling of the soft sheets and these pillows under my head.

"Residual magic?" I ask, hoping she'll shed some light onto what I just experienced.

"It's hard to explain—what happened between you, and Na'amah I mean. I haven't ever seen it like that," she speaks with a tone of confusion lacing her words and I turn my head as I try to decipher the shadow of her body in my room. I can vaguely make out shapes at this point, with minimal colors and depths of perception.

"I don't understand. Any of it. That's the most frustrating part," I reply to her, running the palm of my hand up and down my face.

Thalia doesn't respond at first, but I suddenly feel the left side of my bed sink just slightly as she sits down beside me. "No one does at first. This place operates so strongly on emotions and the otherworldly, not logistics. You won't find facts and science and reasonable explanations here." She rests a hand on my leg, brushing her thumb back and forth in comfort as I listen. "Whether you want to admit it or not, you build a connection with Na'amah. It's an energetic exchange every time you interact, especially when you have sex or she draws these intense emotions out of you. And while you think she feels nothing—it's not true. I promise you that. I've never seen her respond to any of the girls like she does with you."

I close my eyes, deciding not to strain my vision any longer. My head is pounding with a migraine and I'd rather use all of my remaining energy to truly listen to what Thalia is saying.

Part of me wants to believe her, the other part of me doesn't.

“I can never make sense of what I’m feeling around her.” I admit, quietly speaking the words I’ve dared not say before now. “One second, I hate her. For everything she’s done. How could I not? And yet, there’s this darker version of who I am, someone who’s only released when I’m around her. A side of me who is desperate to be closer to her.”

“There’s a freedom you can only explore in this place. With these Queens. Things that are never possible on the upside. You can literally feel the magic pulsing through the air here. It flows freely, moving around each of us in opportunities of connection and release.” Thalia’s voice takes on a new quality, and it’s the first time I’ve truly heard a sense of passion for this place from someone else.

“Do you all feel this way?” I ask, curious if each of them is genuinely glad to be here. How could that be possible? What did they all leave behind?

“For the most part. We each have our own stories, our own reasons for remaining here. But we’ve all fallen in love with Lilith in a different way since Na’amah transferred our bonds to her after our time training for the Bite was complete.”

“I have so many questions, regarding all of this,” I start, opening my eyes and finding a hazier display of what surrounds me. I can almost see everything clearly, and a lighter relief rushes through me thankfully. “I will do the same, if I’m here? Once Na’amah is finished with me, she’ll pass me off to Lilith?”

“Yes. You’ll join the rest of us with her. Build your own connection to Lilith in a way you haven’t had with Na’amah.” My vision brightens even more, and I watch as her gaze softens as she speaks. It feels as though she’s breaking some kind of hard news, as if I ever thought things would be different for me.

I never assumed otherwise though. I knew once Na’amah was finished with me, I’d either be killed or passed off to Lilith. Whichever option they deem most beneficial.

I’m confused by the genuine love in her voice for this place though. That aspect alone forces me to think about their home a bit differently and I wonder if there is some larger picture I’m missing here.

“What happened to your family? The one you left behind.” I ask the difficult question because I need to know...I have to know if she was forced to abandon something else she desperately loved.

“I had none.” She answers easily, offering her story without any further pressing. “I had no siblings. In fact, I was kidnapped when I was incredibly young. Only 5 or 6, and had been sold into sex trafficking after my parents had died in a tragic accident.” She peers at me with a solemn look on her gentle face. “I had grown up in that industry, and had begun taking care of the newer girls coming in. Lilith was the one who found me this time, and I was thankful she did in the state of health I was in.”

My brows pull together in confusion and surprise. “So, they rescued you?” I ask, realizing her story is so wildly different from mine.

“Essentially, yes. But each of us arrived here on different terms. Some of us don’t have the prettiest background in their journey here. I was taken without my full understanding, but I’ve grown to love this place none the less, especially after connecting with Lilith in the ways that I have.” She stands, and steps closer to me for a moment as she glances down at my upper arms. She inspects me, and it’s only then that I glance down to see the thin fabric of my sweater torn and burnt in various places along my skin.

My flesh is pale and uneven in places. It’s lost all of its natural color when the marks are, aside from those familiar streaks of blue that decorate my thighs as well. Only these are far more intense, raising off of my skin as if the ice is eager to break through. Thalia runs her fingers gently over the space and I watch as she tilts her head to the side, observing intently before pulling away.

“What is it?” I ask, assuming these are just as normal as the other marks Na’amah left on me. But the way her eyes widen slightly and her mouth presses into a flat line have me guessing otherwise.

“I just haven’t seen a reaction this powerful, this physical between Na’amah and any of the other girls.” She turns on her heels and walks toward the door of my room, looking back over her shoulder one last time before leaving. “Sleep it off, that will help you heal. The distance between you and Na’amah should aid in recover as well. But i’ll speak to the others and see what the Queens have to say regarding this.”

I want to ask more questions, discuss this further with her seeing as she’s the first person to offer me any real, solid, answers concerning the Underworld. But my eyelids feel heavy, and they flutter closed as exhaustion wins over my need to continue conversing. My aching and sore

body surrenders to sleep entirely, and everything goes dark as my mind spirals through the events of earlier.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

NA'AMAH

That fucking laugh. Loud and high pitched, excited and taunting. Aggie flies into the throne room, running across the floor and leaping into her throne as her eyes snap to me. She lands on her knees, perching her little elbows on the arm and tucking her fists under her chin as she tilts her head and watches me.

Back and forth. Back and forth. That little tilt.

Her mouth is grinning ridiculously wide, her bright white teeth shining amongst her rosy pink lips. I swear her eyes are practically glittering as her gaze bores into the side of my face.

I'm not even looking at her, after that first initial glance I turned away and crossed one leg over my thigh. But she caught me, right there in that moment when my face flinched ever so slightly at the pain shooting through my ribs.

"You're starving." She states ever so arrogantly. Without question. The tone of her voice is laced with effervescent excitement.

I clear my throat, refusing to answer, but god just the motion of swallowing has my stomach twisting apart in agonizing thirst. Everything fucking hurts, every ounce of my body, every muscle, every organ. I've never felt like this before, and it's the first indication that something has gone terribly terribly wrong in the first 48 hours of training Skilla.

"You know, they always say, 'When you know? You know.'" She giggles and shifts in her seat as she plops back, sighing in mock love as she speaks.

“Shut the fuck up,” I bite out, cringing and closing my eyes as another wave of hunger rips under my skin. I groan out, sliding my fingers over my stomach and pressing down as if that will help dull the consistent pain.

“This one? Really?” Eisheth storms into the room, her heeled boots stomping across the ground in thumps that literally pulse through my head. “We need her, Skilla. For Lilith.”

“I need Brielle,” I mutter under my breath, deciding that if I just ignore the two of them, all of this will somehow disappear and go away.

“She’s starving,” Aggie chirps with another knowing smile, and my eyes snap to her as I glare in her direction.

“Not her. Use someone else. Every time you feed from her, you weaken any progress I’ve made in my bond to her. Not to mention the ways she clearly destroys the tether you’ve formed with Skilla.” Lilith emerges from behind the large grand entrance, stepping into the space in her long, black, velvet gown that trails behind her. Her hair is billowing around her shoulders, and her skin is presenting in that same pale, lifeless color it has been recently.

But even her clear illness does nothing to distract from the increasing thirst building within me. Nothing can, and all that’s running through my mind is the taste and sensation of blood.

Blood.

Skilla’s blood.

Her scent, the overwhelming blend of syrupy maple and spiced whiskey. Who would have thought, but every time she’s near me I can smell it heavier and heavier. It’s as though being here has made her blood more potent, enriched the celestial strands of DNA she carries within.

I wasn’t anticipating that; it’s never happened before. But as I brought Brielle in front of her, as my hands worked over her body and my fangs descended, Skilla unleashed an inner Demon I never knew she contained.

Her entire body halted in movement, freezing entirely as her head fell back on her shoulders and her lips parted. A scream escaped her, but it wasn’t like anything I had ever heard before. Everyone was paralyzed in their tracks, Brielle’s blood turned sour on my tongue and the excruciating pain that reverberated through my body was unlike anything I’ve ever felt.

I was being ripped apart, torn in two at the sound of Skilla's voice. My blood boiled, my skin seared, and suddenly everything shifted between us until I was able to calm her once I had released Brielle. Skilla's tone was laced with a poison I swear affected every person in that goddamn room, and has clearly already carried to each of my sisters. Hence why we are obviously meeting in this emergency gathering.

And the hunger has only grown since then. It doesn't make sense, seeing as I fed both yesterday and the night before. I usually only feed once every few weeks, able to sustain my strength and mental stability on a lower supply of blood.

Not since Skilla arrived though, everything's changed since then.

I must have made a grave mistake in bringing her here.

"Explain." Eisheth speaks as she stalks directly in front of me, stopping and crossing her arms over the cinched up emerald green corset at her waist.

"Get me something to fucking eat, and I'll do my best." I bite out, running my fingertips along my temples as I try to stave off the migraine.

"In this state? Absolutely not. You'll kill one of them." Lilith's words carry the power she demands, along with the irritation and possessiveness she holds over her girls. She has certainly picked up on the severity of my hunger now that she's observed me for a few moments, keeping all of her girls off limits for the time being.

My fingers wrap tightly around the arms of my throne, the ice digs into my skin, my own power spilling forth from my touch and frosting the edges of the floor around me. I can hardly control it, my own energy cracking through me like an earthquake.

"Skilla, Skilla, Skilla. Call her in here, she'll help surely." Aggie's mockery is the final straw in my uncontrolled temperament. I snap, lunging toward her so aggressively that my hands wrap around her throat as I drag her to the ground below our four thrones.

God, she's maniacal, and is laughing uncontrollably at my expressed anger and starvation. But she fights back dirty, and before I realize I need to stop her, the palms of her hands are pressing firmly to either side of my head and her amethyst eyes are boring deep into my soul. She's reading me, and I can literally feel her essence breaking through the icy barriers of my mind and shattering what protection I held against her readings.

No, no, no. I can't let her see what I've been thinking. The possibilities I've been considering silently in my mind since I met Skilla.

But I can see it the second she unlocks the idea, her eyes going wide and her touch stilling completely. Her lips part on a quiet gasp, and suddenly she's shifting back away from me, her brows pinched together in shock and disbelief at the notion.

"That's impossible." She snaps, her own frustration now rooting itself in her words. I knew she'd be upset by this; it's why I haven't breathed a word of it to any of them. "

"I know," I whisper, shifting back on my ass and dropping my elbows over my knees. "It doesn't make sense."

"But you're sure," she retorts, suddenly standing and perching her fists on her little waist as she stares down at me.

"What? What are you both going on about?" Eisheth steps between us, but my eyes remain on Aggie. Her chest is shifting up and down in heavy breaths, and I can practically hear how rapidly her heart is thundering.

"You said.." She starts, her lips pressing into a tight line as tears spring to her eyes. "You said we could never."

I shake my head, dropping my gaze to my hands momentarily before looking back up and meeting her stare again. "That's what Lucifer told us. When we were cursed, when Lilith was. We had all lost our ability to—"

"No, no fucking way." Eisheth lifts her hands and runs them through her hair, pulling at the long strands before turning around and pacing the space around us. Lilith slowly steps up to her throne, sitting down as her hard gaze focuses on our conversation.

"I know what I fucking said you guys, I know." My words are heavy with disbelief and grief for Aggie. I know this hits her far harder than the rest of us.

"Say it," she grinds out through clenched teeth as she quickly launches forward and crouches in front of me. Tears fall freely from her eyes now, staining her rosy cheeks and slipping over those kind lips. My heart breaks for her, in the midst of my hunger and thirst, among my disbelief and uncertainty regarding this notion. "Say the words, Na'amah."

I feel so horribly for my youngest sister.

"Ol, Na'amah, Fallen Angel C Arcadia, allar—" I whisper the words in our native language, and the way her hands fly over her ears and she cries out in agony shatters my heart as I watch her.

“Skilla is my Fated.”

“Oh shit,” Thalia’s voice breaks out from behind all of us, and I snap my head around to find her striding into the throne room at that exact moment. Her eyes widen at my admission, her hand flying over her mouth as her steps halt immediately.



CHAPTER TWELVE

NA'AMAH

Aggie has vanished entirely. It's to be expected with this news, and now only myself, Eisheth and Lilith are sitting around a looming fire with drinks in hand as we attempt navigating this situation.

"This is incredibly unexpected." Eisheth admits, taking a sip of her brandy as she lifts her other arm and rests it loosely over her head. She leans back in the lounge chaise completely, her usually peaceful mind now working in overtime at the new possibility.

"But how do you know?" Lilith asks, curiosity pulling at her tone more than anger or disappointment. "Tell us what it feels like. You've bonded to and worked with all of the other girls prior to her." My eldest sister is drinking, but hers is a small glass of Fira's blood, and my eyes linger on the way it stains her lips as she speaks.

I fed, from Thalia while she was in the room. But I'm still hungry, and I wasn't able to consume nearly as much as I'd like in the state I'm currently in. We caught her up on the details of what's happening, but didn't have much more an explanation or resolution moving forward.

It's strange, the ways my body is reacting to everyone else around me now. The idea that I was Fated to Skilla first became apparent when I spent the remainder of my night with Brielle. It was after that moment, everything changed unexpectedly.

"The other night, I had a session with Skilla after I caught her sneaking around the kingdom. She was in the Throne room, and I took her to one of the outer wings before taking her back to her bedroom once I was finished with her. While I was up there, I could sense Brielle waiting for me, and

ever since I met Skilla, I've been far hungrier than usual." I explain, forcibly removing my eyes from Lilith's drink and shifting forward to rest my elbows on my knees while I focus on the heat of the fire in front of me. "I fed and fucked her that night," my eyes glance toward Lilith knowing she won't be absolutely thrilled by that reality. But the truth has always been that the girls are available to each of us when necessary if they aren't bonded to Lilith and her harem yet.

"Of course, you did," she replies, sarcasm dripping from her words as her dark eyes meet mine.

"The point being," I press forward. "I had never experienced something like that before. I fed from her, but her blood was dull and mediocre on my tongue. It hardly sustained me, not like it usually does. And after I had finished, I left her and went back to my own chambers. I fully intended on climbing into bed and falling asleep, but my body reacted in strange ways. Intense, deeply ingrained pains overtook me, and I found myself in vomiting everything I had consumed from her." I sigh as I lean back in my lounge and bounce between both of their eyes. "I know it sounds as though I simply got sick, but it was far more than that. Skilla is the only one on my mind, constantly. Her blood is like a drug to my senses, the only thing I can scent anymore, the only essence that appeals to me in the slightest. It's as though she's the only one who can nourish me in the ways I need. Her body is the only one I envision when I'm alone or with anyone else."

"It sounds like you're in love, Naamie. Not Fated," Eisheth quips skeptically.

I narrow my hard eyes at her, not in the mood for any kind of arrogant counters. "It's more than that. I wouldn't become physically ill at fucking someone else. Or feeding from someone I've tasted countless times now. Especially my most recent submissive." I close my eyes, the vision of Skilla easily springing to mind as I feel for her. We aren't even bonded through blood yet, and I can sense her anywhere in the Kingdom. It's how I found her so easily sneaking around that first night she was here. It's how I found her at her home after the club, how I've been able to trace her whereabouts in only vague sensations and a muted draw to her being. "I've located her without knowing where she is, her blood practically sings when I'm near her. And this morning, in the breakfast hall, the ways we

both physically responded to each other is completely unexplainable to that degree.”

We all fall silent, and I can tell neither of them wants to believe this. Because if it’s true, if I am Fated to Skilla, then that opens possibilities for the rest of them.

And shatters memories regarding Aggie the decisions she’s made in the past.

“It’s in my blood, in my flesh, sisters. I can feel her everywhere. I’m tethered to her unlike anyone else. I need her, in a different way than I’ve ever known. I had to find her that night and bring her back, and I justified it for you.” I look pointedly at Lilith, “And maybe that’s still possible. Maybe we can find a way to use her blood for your—” I halt my words, an intrinsic possessive energy frantically bursting in my chest and begging me not to offer such things.

I’d kill her.

My own sister.

For a girl who wants nothing to do with me.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Skilla

I wake with a startle, launching up in the darkness of my room as my eyes fly open wide and I search for what I'm feeling.

Her.

I can feel her, somehow. In unexplainable ways, I know she's nearby. But everything surrounds in a black abyss, absolutely no light leaks in from the window tonight, or under my door from the common area. My hands pat around my bed, I'm not sure what I'm looking for, but anything to offer some sense of relative surroundings.

"Where are you?" I mutter under my breath, almost not believing what my gut instinct is trying to tell me.

But it's in the very next moment I notice the thin, iridescent layer of frost slowly trailing from door and across my floor. It moves like a pathway, inching closer and closer until it's woven around my bed toward the end. I track it intensely, my heart hammering at the sight as I feel the way the air around us drops several degrees in her familiar wake.

Why is that so comforting to me? Why am I always so drawn here?

She doesn't speak however, and I can vaguely make out the silhouette of her form hovering over the end of my bed. I sit up on my knees, without even realizing what exactly I'm doing, I lean back and lift my hands behind my head, lacing my fingers against my hair. My heart pounds, hammering and hammering away at a rhythm that should probably kill me with its power and speed.

Instead, it wakes me up inside, with the cold air blowing across my body and stiffening my nipples at the presence of her. Suddenly, her eyes

spark in the darkness as she watches me. Those electric blue irises glowing so brightly in the middle of the night. My body physically and intrinsically responds to her, entranced in ways I don't fully understand.

My vision clears despite everything that happened earlier. I'm far more aware than I was before, noticing little details of her movements as I watch her, the small ways my body automatically seeks out hers and the moments I catch myself inwardly begging for her to touch me.

Even after watching her with Brielle earlier.

I must be fucked in the head.

How am I going to escape now? Things feel so muddy all of a sudden. The right answers are feeling wrong and the wrong decisions are feeling so tempting and right.

"Are you not going to speak to me now?" I caution, glaring at her still frame as she watches me. She doesn't flinch, doesn't show any kind of acknowledgement in the slightest. Frustration peaks in my chest and I drop my hands from behind my head and down to my sides. "Really? Do you even understand the damage you cause?" I tilt my head to the side and watch as the glimmer in her eyes darkens into something dangerous, and I feel a shift in the tension between us.

Push her farther.

The words play in my mind like a game, see how far I can take her before she snaps and acknowledges whatever this is. I glide forward, slowly placing my hands on the bed as I move onto my knees. The thin tank top and sleep shorts I changed into hang loosely from my body as I crawl toward her, and I tilt my chin up as my eyes meet hers while she looks down on me.

She's looking down at me. Strangely, my skin heats at the sight of that. My instincts are telling me I've done something wrong, been bad in a way that has her ready to punish me. I think back to our last night together, remembering the ways she dragged those leather strips across my bare skin and her fingers played with my pussy.

Her shoulders square against my form, her small, perfectly round tits giving way to her narrow waist before it blooms just slightly over her hips. Her hands clench tightly into fists at her side remain unmoving, even with every stride I take toward her.

"Does this mean nothing to you?" I whisper, wishing I could reach out and touch her skin. My body still aches in her presence, sore and needy

from every unreleased orgasm and pained touch she's given me.

"You mean nothing to me."

Words. Finally. But they sink through my skin and infect my blood in sharper ways than I anticipated.

She's lying though. I want to say I can feel it, there's no way we hold this tension, this much of a powerful pull toward each other and it mean nothing to her.

Unless this is how it always is here...

"You're lying," I falter, hoping that if I can raise a reaction out of her—she'll touch me. Help me release in the ways I'm so desperate to. It's pathetic, really. Succumbing to this toxic interaction so I can come. But I shake the thought away and let go of it, because I'm tired of fighting every moment of every day here.

"Am I?" Her chin tilts low as I come up to her directly, my eyes level with her stomach until I dare meet her icy gaze. "I'm surrounded by women who want to fuck me, who want to feed me." Her fingers lift to my chin, her thumb grazing across my lower lip as she tugs it down just slightly before slipping inside my mouth and over my tongue. She crouches down so that her eyes are directly across my mine, her face only inches away as her cold breath blows across my achy skin. "Good girls who spread their legs for me."

Fuck. Her words are silky smooth, low and rich and intoxicating even as she speaks about someone else. I shouldn't be so turned on by this, but I am, and I find myself sliding my thighs together in order to find some kind of relief. She shifts her hand so that she's sliding to fingers into my mouth now, her other hand gripping my jaw and tilting my head up as she drags me closer to her chest. "Why would I need anything from you when I can get it so fucking good, from someone else?" She shoves her fingers to the back of my throat and I gag around her touch. She pulls out and pushes back again, until my hands are wrapping around her wrists and I'm gasping for breath.

"You want to fuck me though," I bite out, the brat in me rearing her head as I fall into this dynamic. God, I'm so fucking wet and I'm hoping to all Hell I say the right things in order to keep this going.

She scoffs, loudly, an arrogant smile pulling across her face before she roughly shoves me back and I fall against the bed. She climbs on top of me, her towering frame elicits washes of fear as I scramble back in order

to keep my distance for a moment. But she's far too quick, and I'm already trapped against the head of my bed as she shifts her knees so that one is tucked tightly in-between my thighs. "I don't give a single shit about fucking you. Not when I can walk next door and find Brielle on those little knees waiting for me." She pushes her knee forward and I can't help but let my legs fall wider for her. My chest is heaving with every breath, my nipples tight and stiff as she scrapes across the fabric of my top. "She begs for it, you know?"

"Begs you to fuck her?" I ask, swallowing the growing lump in my throat as Na'amah dips low and drags her nose over my ear. Her lips brush my skin, her breath blowing over me in ways that send goosebumps erupting along my flesh and shivers racing down my spine.

"God, yes. She wants it so badly. Spreads those sweet thighs and touches herself while she waits for me." Her hand slips over my shirt, her cold touch running over my heavy tits until she grips my tank and quickly yanks it up over my head. Her fingers return to my nipple, pulling and tugging while she rolls it in her touch. I moan out, trying to focus on steady breaths while I listen to her.

"I don't want you to touch her," I whisper, tilting my head up as she sucks my ear between her lips then nips me with her teeth. There's something so erotic about this and I wish I could logically explain why I'm so turned on. Listening to her talk about someone else, while she's here with me, touching me.

It's power and humiliation all in one. I want to please her, I want to be the girl she chooses, and yet I want to hear about all the ways I wasn't good enough before now.

"Too late, my Kitten." She drops her hand lower, moving between my legs as her lips glide down to my throat. Her fangs have dropped, because I feel the tips scraping along my flesh. I want her to bite me, right now, in this moment. I want her fingers inside of me while she takes and takes and takes whatever it is she fucking needs. "I've already fucked her, just like I'm about to do to you." Her fingers slip under my shorts and over my pussy, my arousal slicking her touch as she circles my clit. "Will you moan for me like she does? Be a good girl for me and come when you're told?"

Suddenly, her other hand grips my hip as she yanks me down so that I'm lying flat on the bed below her. Her lips run over my jaw, her tongue

sweeping out and licking my skin like she's savoring my taste completely. I gasp and arch my back as she teases my core, slowly sliding down and back but pulling away just slightly as I roll my hips toward her touch.

"Answer me," she demands, stilling her touch completely as a whimper escapes my lips. My hands lift and run over her shoulders, realizing this is the first time I've ever truly felt her skin at my own desire.

"Yes," I whisper, letting my fingers slide to the back of her neck as I pull her against me again. I'm so needy, it's ridiculous, and the answering scoff she supplies tells me I'm far too obvious about it.

"Yes, what?" She presses, urging me to use the name I know she wants me to.

But something has changed since our encounter earlier. An obscure realization and surrender have taken hold, and I don't know if it'll change. I'm not saying I won't escape this place—I will. But tonight, I want to feel this. All of it. I want to meet her in this space and submit to her ownership.

And I want to fucking come. For some reason, I hope I'll have a clearer head once I do.

Her lips hover over mine as she awaits my response, her hand pressed against my core in ways that have me nearly begging for more. I'm ready for her to slip inside me, and the nearness of her lips as me wishing they were on mine already.

"Yes, Alca." I speak the words on a hushed tone, my voice pitching higher than I anticipate but lost in complete surrender to her.

She's silent for a moment, her eyes searching mine in a way that has me suddenly confused and worried that I did something wrong. She watches me, her breaths coming quick and syncing with my own rhythm. The tension between us builds into a thicker wash of something resembling acceptance.

Conceding. Falling. Yielding.

As if she's submitting to me in the same moment I am to her.

"What?" I speak the word but don't have a chance to finish the thought. Her lips crash onto mine as her fingers dive inside of me. I cry out in the same moment, stretching around her touch as her lips swallow my every sound. My fingers dig into her skin as I hold onto her tightly. She slides out of my core, circling over my clit and pinching it roughly

before slipping back down and fucking me again. She moves deep and slow, working me higher and higher as my body moves with hers in unison.

It's fucking insane. All of this. The intensity of her lips moving over my mouth, her tongue crashing with my mine before her teeth bite my lower lip and she tugs harshly. I keep thinking she'll draw blood, and god, I want her too. I'm willing to give her everything in this moment while she fucks me like she is.

"You're different," she pulls back slightly, enough to have my hands falling to my sides as she moves back on her knees. Her words catch me off guard, and I shift up on my elbows while my gaze watches her every movement.

She pulls out of me for a single moment in order to yank my shorts off my legs. She grips my thighs tightly, shoving them apart before her hand is back on my pussy again. Her touch is ice cold, and it's now in this moment, as I'm watching everything so intently that I can literally see the electric blue glow of her hands coursing through my skin where she holds me.

"Everything about you." Her tone is heavy, as if she's admitting something she shouldn't. "But the second my sister found you at the club." She pushes back inside me, and I suck in a deep breath before releasing a quiet moan. She's so fucking deep, and her eyes are trained on the space between my legs while she moves inside me. "The second I scented your blood—I knew I had to taste you."

My head falls back uncontrollably and she picks up the pace. I swear my thighs feel as though they are trembling, my chest and skin slick with a heat that counters her ice tremendously. "I want you to," I say quickly on breathy words and quiet pleas. "I want you to bite me."

She groans out as her fingers around my thigh tightens and she sits up and moves closer to me. She's sliding in quicker now, slipping out to run over my clit before diving inside me with two fingers this time. But just as I tell her what I want from her, she drags her touch away and slaps her palm directly against my core. I cry out and launch upwards, her hand lunging toward my throat as she fiercely yanks me toward her. She's towering over me, the pain of her grip lighting across my jaw in ways that make me ever wetter than I imagined possible. "Do not say that, again. Don't fucking tempt me. You wouldn't survive the fucking Bite now."

Anger pierces my gut and drowns my senses. “How do you know?” I grind back, pressing my hands against her chest as I try shoving her away. “You have no idea what I’ve been through. Or what I can and can’t fucking handle.” She doesn’t let me get away with this though, and I’m quickly shoved back against the bed when her mouth is barely an inch from my throat. She pins me underneath her with one hand securing my jaw in place and her knee pressed firmly against my thigh.

“You’re pathetically easy to read, Skilla,” she whispers, her fangs now resting over my throat as I focus on the sting of those two points. My heart is racing in my chest, my forearms pressed tightly against her chest in what I’d like think is a barrier. But in actuality, she’s pinning me there as well, I’m completely at her mercy in more ways than one. “Especially after meeting your brother and seeing the sick, twisted ways he’s fought to control you. And the other girls, I can smell their scents on your skin. Lingering encounters of shallow, mediocre fucks staining your flesh.”

I halt, my thoughts quickly spiraling through the idea that she knows who I’ve been with. What the hell? “You can smell them on me?” I counter, a sudden wash of disgust rolling through me at the reminder of those fucking moments.

“Such a filthy girl.” Her fangs push deeper but don’t pierce my skin just yet. Her tongue slips out, the tip running over my flesh as her mouth drags lower. “I hate it. The idea that there was ever anyone before me.” These words are barely even a whisper, hardly audible enough for me to even hear them but they consume me.

She consumes me.

Her mouth moves down to my chest, kissing over the swell of my breast before gliding even lower. My eyes watch her, lingering on the white strands of her hair braided back on top of her head. I want to see those eyes again, have them meet me in this secret and mysterious place we’re exploring together.

Everything has shifted inside of me, between us. I don’t know what it is, but the energy here is intoxicating in a way that has me addicted to her presence.

“What are you trying to say?” I ask her, hoping to breach whatever wall she has remaining here.

She ignores me, her lips immediately moving over my stiff nipples as she sucks me into her mouth. I fall back again, arching my back, pressing

my chest hard against her before looking up to watch again. Her tongue slips out and circles me, flicking over the tip before sucking me again and biting down with her teeth.

Holy fuck, I can feel her fangs.

Her head tilts up just briefly as I watch her lick me, and it's in that moment I see the quick shine of her fangs in the darkness.

Against my skin.

Over my flesh.

Scraping along my hard nipples and nearly drawing blood in every touch.

"You're so sexy on your back like this. Submitting for me, spreading those pretty legs for me." She praises me, in a way she hasn't done before and I unravel at the heated words. "Be a good girl and come for me, Kitten. Can you do that?"

Full send. I'm gone. Present for this moment and whatever this is. She isn't giving me answers, but I'm not surprised. I'll lose myself to the cresting orgasm inside of me instead.

"Yes, Alca. Please," I beg her, running my fingers over the side of her shaved head as she looks up at me.

"Please what," she urges, moving her powerful arm back down between my thighs as she teases my core. "Tell me exactly what you'd like me to do to you."

I breathe in deeply, suddenly nervous to speak such filthy words to her. But her fingers play with my pussy, my wetness sounding with her touch in erotic and encouraging ways. "I want you to touch me," I caution, and she continues doing exactly that but no further. God, she wants me to be detailed, do exactly as she says. "Shit."

She shifts my thigh even wider apart and presses her lips to the soft inner skin there. I mistakenly assume she's being sweet for a moment, but cry out in pain as her teeth bite down hard before releasing. "Don't make me go elsewhere for what I want." Her heated eyes meet mine directly, authority and dominance thundering through them in ways that practically touch my fucking soul.

Both jealousy and arousal strike me at her words. The immediate hatred at the idea of that even happening, and still pulling at small, secret parts of me that like it.

“I want you to fuck me,” I finally admit. “Slide inside of me like you were, deep and slow.” My voice pitches high in embarrassment as I speak. Nerves wracking through my body as she watches me.

Immediately though, she does exactly that. She pushes two fingers inside of me at once and my legs fall open even wider. She goes deep, so much so that it feels euphoric and my entire being succumbs to the touch of her. It’s addicting, this feeling. The way I so easily melt and fall apart at the seams while she fucks me.

I’ve never experienced anything like this. And I’m so ready to come for her, I feel tears prick the backs of my eyes while she pulls and pushes in slowly. Stars practically dance behind my eyelids, hints of my charged orgasm finally coming into view.

I’m tempted to keep going, see how much she’ll give me while we’re like this. “I want you taste me,” I start, shifting my hand and bringing it in-between my own thighs now. Her eyes fall to the action as she listens to me, and I visibly see her shoulders moving up and down with each heavy breath. I slide my finger over my clit, slipping through myself until my touch meets hers.

A connection. A momentary brush of fingertips and knuckles while I’m writhing beneath her.

I swear, a new power and confidence rushes through my every action while I do this. It’s incredible, how I can see her being just as worked up as I am. I wish I could touch her, slip these fingers inside of her and make her come for me in this way. But I know that isn’t possible yet, and I not sure when or if that will change between us.

My orgasm is building rapidly, twisting and coiling in my lower belly as we both work in unison to drag me closer. She doesn’t stop fucking me, and I glide back up to my clit and play with myself while I quickly lose control. “In every sense of the word. My blood. My skin. My lips. I want you to lick me, eat me while I come undone for you, Alca.”

She snaps her attention to me, her eyes darkening completely into a navy blue that nearly frightens me. It’s a shade full of power and strength, a reminder that she is in total control over what I can and can’t experience.

“I will not Bite you. Ever.” Her words are sharp and final, leaving a sting that sinks my heart completely. I’m confused as to why this is suddenly forever off the table and an array of disheartening thoughts flash

in my mind. Her tone softens incrementally as she continues, “I won’t risk that. Not with you. I know you don’t understand and I don’t know when I’ll be able to explain. But this is what we will forever be. It won’t go farther than this.”

I want to respond, to push back at the new verbiage she’s demanding but she doesn’t even give me the chance to process it. Instead, she leans forward, ripping my hand away from my own clit and replacing the touch with her lips. I inhale a desperate breath, my hand flying to the back of her head as my hips roll up to chase her fingers and her mouth now.

Her tongue slides out and through my pussy fully, moving over my clit before she sucks it into her mouth and grazes her teeth along my sweet, sensitive skin. “Come for me, Kitten.” She pulls back and commands me as she somehow manages to fuck me even deeper and at a quicker pace. Her lips work over me again, slick and cold like ice frosting over my skin. It’s practically immediate, and I’m crying out on loud, incredible moans while I speak her name and frantically pull her tightly against me.

Her one hand continues fucking me, rolling me directly into a second orgasm that rips through my body in earth shattering waves. Her other hand quickly holds my hip against the bed, forcing me still while she devours my clit with her hot mouth and slick tongue.

“I can’t,” I breathe out, fully surrendering to the strongest orgasm I’ve ever experienced in my entire life. “I can’t.” I need her to stop, absolutely positive I’ll die at the explosion wracking my body.

She slows her movements, allowing the release to quiet and roll through me in deep, sensual waves. I’m catching my breath, my arm slung over my eyes when I finally lift my head and look for her.

She’s still licking me, her touch turning slow and sweet while my thighs press tightly to the sides of her face. Her hands roam my body, sweeping over my stomach and chest before she finally pulls back and reaches for my face.

I’m shocked, for a moment, still coming down from my orgasms when her lips suddenly crash into mine. Her tongue instantly pushes into my mouth and I can taste every bit of my own cum on her flesh as she does it. “You are mine.” She growls out as she kisses me with an intensity I wasn’t expecting. It’s as though she’s starving for so much more than simply my blood, her entire soul, her essence is craving whatever it is I have to offer her.

I can feel it, this this energy and ambiance snaking around us and coming together in clashes of passion and thirst.

“All of you. You belong to me, do you understand?”

It's overwhelming. I'm obsessed with the ways she reveals her dominance. Knowing this is me on her flesh, my orgasms staining her skin, making her like this just as she's marked me in other ways. “Yes, Alca. Only yours.”

I'm attached.

Quickly. Completely. Before I could even stop it from happening. Before I could logically remind myself the dangers of this place, of this... Vampire.

Fucking Hell. I've made a very grave mistake at the hands of Na'amah.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

NA'AMAH

I'm pacing. My feet moving me back and forth across the stone floor of Lilith's chambers as I listen to her quietly pour herself a glass of wine and then stride back over to her lounge chair sitting in front of her fire.

"Breathe, Naamie." She speaks so arrogantly and it grinds against my nerves. As if all of this is perfectly fine—but it isn't.

If I can't share Na'amah with her, then we're down one available body for her sustenance. And I don't think I can fucking share her...not now that I've spoken out loud what this is between us.

"I didn't want her to begin with." Her words are casual, but callous and I find my head snapping her direction with a fiery hiss escaping my lips.

She lifts her deep red wine to her lips without breaking eye contact with me, and the color stains her skin in what looks to be blood as well.

My heart jumps. My skin pulls tight.

That's the other fucking thing. I'm starving. Hungrier than I've ever been and hardly satiated after feeding from the other girls. Sometimes I'm able to keep it down, sometimes I'm not.

Things are spiraling out of control quickly and it's been a little over a week now.

Skilla is confused though, I can feel it from her. The way my body is in tune to hers is unlike any of the other girls I've ever broken. My blood seeks hers in the kingdom, my soul constantly scanning every room, every hallway for the scent of her flesh.

It's a fucking sword, skinning the flesh from my bones when I'm away from her, and then dangling my preferred drug in front of my addictive

nature when I'm finally in her presence.

She doesn't fucking understand though. She has no language to describe what we are, and in her mind, I'm far different than what is actually warring inside of me.

I'm angry and irritable. Distanced from her energy, yet demanding and authoritative when I'm forcing her to submit. I intentionally try not to touch her, so I haven't been in her room since the last time we were together. I've never been so close to coming myself, without even being touched. And I'd be lying if there wasn't a part of me whispering to allow her that luxury of fucking me herself.

I knew she wanted to. It was in the sweet sweat beading over her hot flesh and her honeyed cum slicking my tongue.

"You need to tell her, Naamie. Explain to her what this means." Lilith winces in discomfort just slightly as she adjusts herself on her lounge. Her skin is paper thin and nearing an iridescent white. She's getting worse, and I know I should offer Skilla as a small portion of her nourishment.

I should. I fucking need to.

"Telling her does nothing. Telling her changes nothing," I mutter, lifting my fingertips to my mouth and quickly chewing along my nail beds. I tuck my other hand tightly across my chest and rest my other elbow on my forearm. "If she knows, that actually puts her at a far greater risk for Lucifer."

Lilith visibly rolls her eyes and then drops her head back to rest against the ebony velvet. Her entire room is draped in that fabric—her bed, her chairs, the walls. Her wardrobe is largely made up of everything black as well and we've become accustomed to the way each of us tends to live according to those fucking colors.

Assigned to each of us when we cursed and became Fallen, another box to constrain our identities when we thought we had lost everything.

"Telling her changes everything. If you don't, you'll keep her prisoner here with no reasoning. Her blood won't be used as the other girls will, you'll continue keeping your distance from her, denying touching her, no communication." She struggles to lift her head momentarily, but her stark, dark gaze meets mine head on. "And she'll never know why, she'll never understand why she isn't being chosen. Or worse even, she'll never know why you are choosing everyone else over her."

A disappointed and anticipatory shiver races down my spine as I drop my hands and slide them into the pockets of my black denim jeans. They have diagonal ridges running along the thighs, tight over my muscular frame all the way down to my ankles and tucked into a pair of black cargo boots.

“Fuck.” I finally release as acceptance burrows in my head and heart. I have to fucking tell her.

“Fuck is right.” Lilith lifts her wine glass and chugs the rest in only a few swallows. “You’ll have to tell her, and then no one else can know. I’ll talk to my girls, explain what’s happening. But Lucifer cannot discover what this is until we understand it fully.”

“He’ll exploit this,” I agree, turning on my heels and making my way toward the door of her room. “And that witch of his won’t be safe.”

“She was never safe.”

I scoff, “Not true. Despite the past you two have, he has his claws sunk so deeply inside of Esme, he doesn’t even realize how far he’s willing to go for her.” Pulling open her door, I step out, ready to find Skilla and get on with the day. “I have to take Skilla back to the house she was residing in today, gather her things. I’ll tell her then, prepare her for the dinner party tomorrow and what will need to take place.”

“He’ll be watching,” Lilith’s voice pitches in a tone filled with warning and alarm. “You’ll have to prove she means nothing.”

An uncontrolled growl scrapes up my throat and spill free of my possessive lips. “You aren’t biting her.” God, the thought of someone else tasting her like that, when her blood calls to me so fiercely is nauseating.

But Lilith laughs as leans back and crosses one leg over the other. I ignore her, and just as I step out of her door, Brielle storms up to me with wide, sad eyes. She’s been crying, I can feel it from her and absently lift my thumb to slip across her tears and pull them into my mouth.

Ahh. Grief. Rejection. Anger. Heartbreak.

“Brielle,” I say quietly, wishing she could have attached to Lilith as easily as the others. “I’m sor—”

“Where have you been this week?” She asks, her voice cold as she clearly attempts holding back further tears. I glance back into Lilith’s room and find her watching us intently.

“I’ve been busy,” I respond, realizing I’ll need to keep my voice firm as I step back into my usual role with the girls. Closing up any signs of

vulnerability and emotion. “Have you been meeting with Lilith?”

“What is so fucking different about her?” She demands, and I subtly glance down to find her fists clenching at her sides. I know she isn’t talking about my sister. Her reference is full of too much resentment to mean Lilith.

My gaze hardens against hers and I square my shoulders, lifting a hand to rest on the nape of her neck. I can smell her blood, and I’d love to take a sweet bite in that thick, pulsing vein my eyes so easily fall to. But I can’t. I’ve been feeding far too often as it is now, and Brielle is the last person on my roster for this very reason.

I step around her, conveniently turning so that she’s closes to the open door of Lilith’s room. “Do not step out of place, Brielle.” I whisper, leaning in close to her ear before pulling back and watching her face twist in anger.

But she doesn’t speak, her respond muted in her mouth on unsaid words and irritations I can feel emanating from her.

I nod my head, closing the conversation between us and then pointing to Lilith. “She wants to spend time with you, Brielle. Open up to her in the ways you have with me.” Offering a small smile, I watch as she reluctantly steps into my sister’s room. The lingering scent of betrayal resides on her skin, but it’s no longer my problem. And I have far more complex issues to focus on at the moment.

Turning around, I finally stride through the halls of the castle as I move toward the throne room. Skilla knows to be waiting for me, but she hasn’t been briefed on what we are doing today.

Before I step inside the expansive area, I pause. Closing my eyes, I focus my energy and intent on what we are accomplishing today. I focus my hunger, the thirst grating along the insides of my organs, my fucking flesh. The darkness seeping through my mind and poisoning every move I make with the desire to feed.

In the next instant, I scent her. That familiar calling, the thick, honeyed draw of her crimson essence begging for my taste. My fangs descend, immediately, painfully. Piercing through my gums and leaving me with a sense of fucking fragility, starvation, unquenchable thirst.

I groan out, feeling that agonizing hunger coil in my gut and spread through all of my limbs.

She's just through that doorway, and I can hear the subtle flutter of her heart as she anticipates my approach. She can feel me too, maybe not in ways she fully understands or can label.

But she knows I'm close.

I shake my head, attempting to physically evade the way she so intrinsically affects me. God, even now, images of her coming on my tongue, the sounds she desperately made when I touched her, flood my mind in reminders of how badly I wanted to bite her then. Sink my fangs into the luscious flesh of her inner thighs and drink.

Her pulse quickens.

My inner thighs absently shift together, my own arousal wetting my skin and slicking my core.

How the fuck am I going to remain close to her all day, without touching her? Without tasting her?

I shrug it off, braving the first step as I straighten my shoulders and my spine. I move into the space and my eyes fall to the swell of Skilla's ass in a pair of black, distressed denim skinny jeans. A light, ice blue crop top pairs perfectly, cinching tight around her small waist and widening into long sleeves down to her wrists.

As soon as I'm only a few steps into the room, she turns around and faces me. My gaze drops momentarily, catching the way her top dips low in a square neckline, exposing her perfect tits, that creamy skin glowing against the pale blue of her shirt.

Fuck. Fuck.

The swell of her chest is just as tempting as the vein pulsing at the side of her throat. So many places I'd love to take sweet sips from.

My stomach growls, loudly, and her eyes drop at the clearly audible fucking sound. I clear my throat instead to mask it, and in that moment realize how Skilla and I are both matching in color today. My own top a tight, light blue T-shirt that clings to my chest and waist tightly.

"Hi," she speaks. The single, simple word working over me headier than any touch I've ever experienced.

She's nervous, and fuck I love that.

Goddamn, stay focused.

"We're going back to your house today." I ignore her greeting, shifting my gaze and looking past her as I stride easily to the other side of the room. She follows my lead, knowing exactly what to do now that she's

adjusted to this place a bit more. “We need to gather the rest of your necessities. Anything you want to keep, more clothes, important objects. I’m not aware of your step-brother’s schedule. But we’ll confront him when we arrive if he’s there.”

“Wait, what?” Her voice is clipped, already irritated at I’m assuming my lack of connection and greeting when I entered the room. I have to remain distant from her, for reasons she won’t understand. But it’s only for her safety that I treat her this way. “I don’t want to see Rowan.”

“Don’t worry about him, he means nothing,” I reply easily, keeping my tone casual even while my mind replays all the many ways I’d love to skin him alive and watch him die for the ways he’s touched her. “We have... many things to discuss today.” My words hesitate for a moment, knowing we’re coming close to a conversation I don’t even fully understand yet.

“Rowan means far more than nothing, Na’amah—”

“Alca.”

She scoffs, clear annoyance thick in her voice as she speaks. “Fuck you, Alca. Listen to me.”

I whip around at the swift bite to her voice and verbal attack. I find myself moving without preamble, without thinking my actions through, I shove her back against the stone wall of the hallway beside us. Her body pressed tightly to the surface and pinned up against my chest. My hand launches forward and wraps around her throat, my fingers holding her jaw in place as I force her head up to meet my gaze.

“Do not ever speak to me like that again,” I grind out, letting my other hand fall to her waist while my fingers dig into her flesh. Her heart pounds as she watches me, her eyes bleeding with anticipation and tension in every passing moment. My knee shifts between her thighs, moving up subtly with every heavy breath I release. Her chest grazes mine with her own rapid inhales, the surge of tension between us flows through her blood and I scent her even more. I can’t help it, I lean forward, dragging my nose along her heated skin and up into the strands of her auburn hair. “Do you understand me?” I breathe in, deeply, wholly. Relishing in the ways I can practically taste the honey of her blood already.

She’s my addiction. My fixation. My absolute and utter obsession.

“Learn to listen to the words I say, and I’ll start respecting you in the ways you demand.” Her voice is curt, holding an authority all her own that somehow lights me on fire even further.

Most girls don't talk to me this way. But there's a fire inside of Skilla, the shadows of pain and abuse strengthening her fight against me.

Oh shit, a realization suddenly strikes me. I pull back, meeting her eyes while my hands remain firmly on her body. I search them, watching the forest derived shades shift into power and passion all at once. My own gaze narrows as I remember the ways I so easily wrote her off when I first met her. I was so positive she was too weak, too fragile to be broken, or to handle and survive the Bite.

But my perception was completely off. My assumptions absolutely incorrect in what I thought I knew of her.

Skilla is stronger than any girl I've ever broken before. Her power is tangible, her effervescent energy spilling into those around her. The ways in which she deflects, or pushes back are signs of any weakness or lack of vitality.

No fucking way.

She's steadfast in her identity, powerful in her own making, her own fucking story.

My eyes narrow as my head tilts to the side and I slip my thumb over her lower lip, tracing the plump line and feeling the heat of her breath wash over my skin.

"I don't think you even know it," I whisper, awe silking my tone as everything clicks together in my mind.

Her brows pinch together in confusion and she pulls back just slightly so she can move out of my hold. "What?"

I'm falling. Far too quickly. Far too intensely. And suddenly, I'm terrified I'll lose control before I can protect her in the ways this Fated connection will need.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Skilla

My heart is racing in my chest. Everything around me feels...small. And yet grand at the exact same time. The atmosphere presses against my skin, my insides and the pressure of Na'amah against my body is as liberating as it is drowning.

I can't breathe.

And yet it feels like oxygen is filling my lungs for the very first time.

She doesn't answer my question—I'm not surprised though. When does she ever?

The last week has been filled with far more questions than resolutions, more lingering thoughts, pleas for a single touch that leaves me hungry for anything she'll give me.

Which is nothing...as of late. Ever since she snuck into my room that night, since I lost control completely and handed everything over to her.

I've been given nothing.

I'm a fucking idiot. Once again, losing myself to someone who actively chooses another. Why is this the type of person, the type of relationship I continually manifest? What fucking lesson is the Universe deeming necessary for my goddamn evolution?

I shove her away from me, stepping around her before turning and crossing my arms tightly over my chest. "If Rowan is there, he'll try something." I stammer, unsure of how to explain exactly what I'm concerned over. "With you, or with me. I don't know. He'll want me back though, and while I realize this place—" Lifting my hands, I motion around me. "—Isn't ideal for me. I don't want to go back to him either."

Na'amah watches my every move, her gaze following my hands, moving to my lips, dropping to my chest, and then meeting my eyes again. She listens...just as I demanded. To every word being spoken of my tongue into the thick energy around us.

"Rowan won't touch you," she replies flatly, as if there was never another option available to us. Her low, raspy voice licks across my skin and sends a wave between my legs as she speaks. I stand in silence, disbelief leaking into my stomach as the memories of my step-brother flash through my mind. "You have my word."

"How do I trust your *word*, Na'amah?" My head spins, racing with hypothetical scenarios of what we could be walking into. Me, in a home, with both of my monsters. How do I save myself? When I'm the prey and they're the killers.

When both have taken so much from me already, in very different ways. But stolen none the less.

Suddenly, Na'amah steps forward. Her towering frame stands so easily above my own, her wide shoulders leading to those powerful arms. Her creamy skin, glowing in the dim lighting along with her electric blue eyes.

Those eyes. I wish I could read them easier than I do now. Shadows dance along the walls on either side of us, casting rays over her frozen gaze as she continues stepping forward until my back is pressed against the wall once again. This time however, she doesn't pin me in place, she doesn't use her strength to force me into submission.

No, instead, her hands fall to the wall on either side of my face, She leans down, her lips only millimeters away from my own. I gasp, and as I do, I taste the sweetness of her cold breath blowing against my skin. I can't get enough of it, and I dangerously edge closer to her, already imagining the feeling of her hands on my skin.

Her tongue in between my legs.

Her fangs in my throat.

Slowly, she lifts one hand and drops to my own, lifting my fingers and dragging them up her body in a paced, and tentative touch. My fingers glide up the soft, rippled abs of her stomach, grazing over the slight swell of her chest, and I instantly sense the natural cold her bodies holds where mine remains hot and heavy,.

I can't even believe she's allowing me to touch her like this, and I'm clinging to this piece of vulnerability she's gifting me.

"Tell me you've ever felt this before," she urges, and her words prick along my skin in a way I'm unfamiliar to.

"What do you mean?" I press further, hoping she'll give me a deeper explanation.

"How do you feel when you're near me, Skilla?" She uses my name this time, it's rare that she does that. And somehow, hearing my name off her lips is meeting a deep need I didn't realize I so recklessly held.

But it's her question that has my mind churning and my natural instinct telling me to step back from this moment. I don't want to face this, open myself up to the reality of how I feel around her.

I've done that before, and every single time I'm the one left alone and abandoned while they move on with someone else.

"No," I whisper, refusing to answer her. "I don't want to talk about this." I drop my gaze from hers and attempt stepping away, but Na'amah is directly on me again, her hands slipping to my face as she tilts my head up and toward her.

"Look at me," her words a hushed, but not any less commanding. It holds the same intoxicating rasp of hedonistic whiskey, working over my skin and through my ears in dangerously enticing ways.

"No." I close my eyes. I'm not doing this, not again. Not ever again.

A heavy silence settles in the air and everything drops a few degrees lower. Na'amah doesn't move, not in the slightest, and my heart hammers against my tight skin as I strain to hold my ground.

Without a word, the energy in her hold shifts. It turns from something full of authority, to a far gentler touch. Her thumb strokes the soft skin under my jaw, her fingertips press into the nape of my neck. I dare not open my eyes, positive that if I make a single move, the magic here will break and I'll be forced to face whatever this is.

But she continues touching me, one of her hands falling down to my chest and over my heart, as if she's feeling for the frantic thud of my heart. Her head leans closer to me, I can feel the chill of her breath falling closer to my jaw. Her lips slowly fall next, moving across my skin in subtle sucks and then nips while the palm of her hand presses firmly over my heart beat.

The rhythm quickens as her lips fall lower, moving over the narrow column of my neck and down to the delicate curve of my shoulder. I notice her fangs next, and it peaks my heartbeat even more as my nipples quickly stiffen and pull tight against the thin fabric of my top. Everything she does evokes an instinctual response from my body. Like we're tied together—she pulls I follow, I push she draws back.

A tether, a binding of synchronized desires, universal connections that work in symbiosis with each other.

Magic. A symphony of the sounds she draws from my lips, and the surrender I believe I'm earning from her.

"Say it," she whispers, as her fangs press into my skin without break the surface. "Please," her tone turns pleading, and I'm caught off guard so incredibly that I almost buckle at the knees when I hear it. Without clarifying what she wants, I already know, and the tiniest crack in my facade begins showing.

"Bite me," I reply instead, asking for something just as important to me as this must be for her. Hopefully, this will distract her enough that I can continue hiding from my own truth.

"No," she responds on a groan, but I slip my fingers over the back of her neck and draw her even closer to me. I tilt my head to the side, the sting intensifying just slightly as I anticipate the upcoming break. She scoffs, just slightly as she continues speaking against my skin in between nips and kisses. "You have no idea how tied up the concepts we are both asking of each other are."

"If I tell you, will you Bite me?" I ask, inhaling heavy breaths while my arousal slicks my inner thighs and my pussy begins pulsing in need to be filled. My nipples scrape against hers with every inhale, and I arch my back in search of more.

"No."

The single word crashes through me like a bucket of ice, anger and irritation winning in the war of lust and fight.

"Then I'm not saying it," I sigh out and open my eyes, forcing myself out of her hold as I step away from her. "Let's go."

As if everything has changed again, all at once, Na'amah easily steps past me and leads the way down the remainder of the hallway and past the large, expansive dining hall I've never seen before. I pause as we come up to a set of grand, large golden doors spread wide open and peek inside,

noticing countless—for lack of a better word—people running about and preparing for the upcoming event. I’ve known about this from the beginning, but I haven’t heard of the details now that we are approaching it tomorrow.

I don’t ask however, the moment for answers has passed and Na’amah and I are clearly lost to the turmoil of whatever this is between us.

We finally reach a set of doors just past the main dining hall, this one narrow and small. A dark wooden entrance with black iron bolts in four corners of the panel. Na’amah easily pushes on the iron lever and opens it, leading us to a space outside the castle grounds.

Outside. Holy shit.

It’s the first time I’ve been outside since I was taken. The scent of fresh air, of trees and nature and spring flowers blow all around me. The breeze is slight, but wildly refreshing, and I find myself taking large, deep breaths as I close my eyes and listen.

Birds.

Actual birds. I had no idea those existed here...or what kinds of animals can be found in this place.

When I open my eyes again, I find Na’amah standing several feet away from me. She’s simply watching, her hands tucked into the pockets of her black jeans, her eyes relaxed in a way I’ve never seen before. My gaze falls to her lips, her usual pale pink now a dusty rose after her exploration of my throat.

My skin heats again already, and I nervously lift a hand to run my fingers along the places she was kissing me only moments ago.

“Come on,” she finally demands and turns on her heels without another word. I follow her in silence, our quiet steps only met by the sounds of nature around us. I observe as we move, nearing the forest I sometimes notice from inside my bedroom window. I swear the colors here are indescribably more vibrant. Greener greens, bluer blues, richer hues on the flowers scattered across the ground and darker darks as we approach the treelike ahead of us.

A strange and eerie shiver races over my spine as we near it. My stomach twisting in something uncomfortable and alarming with every step closer. Those alarms sound in my mind once again, telling me to stop, to slow down and not enter this decidedly evil expanse.

“Wait,” I start, but Na’amah is already stopping just before we enter the forest. She turns around and comes back toward me, moving to stand behind my back as she leans down and speaks into my ear directly.

“Do not ever enter this forest,” she warns and the genuine threat in her tone has the hair standing up on the back of my neck and my pulse gaining speed. “This belongs to Lucifer. It’s his forest, and only darkness resides beyond this point. You will never enter this place.”

I nod my head in silent agreement, too nervous to speak as stronger, unsettled waves wash over me. I want to get away from here, and it’s in the next moment I turn toward Na’amah.

She moves quicker than I can anticipate, her arms swiftly wrapping around my shoulders as she speaks the word I haven’t heard since I first arrived here. “*Salman*.”

Everything happens just as it did before, and I wish I could adjust easily to the way we hastily fall through the ground and whip through unknown and mysterious spaces. But I can’t, and I’m clinging to Na’amah for my life as brief instances pass before we arrive exactly where we left the last time.

In the field across from my home, in the dark night of my city. I’m struggling to catch my breath as Na’amah releases me without a second thought, stepping away and immediately moving toward the house I’ve spent so much of my adult life in. I lean over and rest my hands on my knees, trying to still the spinning in my head and the nausea rolling through my stomach. When I feel it’s passed, I stand and scan the front driveway, looking for the sleek black Lexus RC he’s been driving lately.

I don’t see it however, and my heart beats a liberating rhythm at the realization that we can sneak in and out without any sort of confrontation with him.

“He’s not here,” I yell toward her, lifting my hand and cupping the outside of my mouth. My shoulders shiver slightly at the cold, but I can’t tell if it’s the actual weather or the wake of Na’amah’s detached and cold nature striding ahead of me.

“I know,” she replies arrogantly. “I don’t hear his pulse or scent his blood.” She walks up the several steps leading to the doorway, and without waiting for my approach, twists the door knob and throws her booted foot into the latch, breaking it open until it swings wide.

“Jesus Christ,” I mutter under my breath as I hurry up behind her.

“Will be of absolutely no help to you.” Her voice is offhand, her tone impassive as her towering figure strides through my doorway and into my house. I vaguely process what she’s saying, as if she knows Jesus Christ on a personal level.

The sudden recognition that could actually be true pulls at the religious foundation and trauma I was raised on. I don’t even know how to process that reality in this moment, especially since I’ve written off religion my entire adult life.

I watch as her head slowly scans back and forth over the area, and I step up beside her in order to gauge what her reaction holds.

A completely stoic and unresponsive face. Her features masked perfectly to show no signs of what she’s feeling. The only indicator of her emotions is the way I feel the air drop several degrees in the house, even with the low rumble of our heater running in the distance.

Na’amah slides her hands into her pockets as she glides forward and toward the small long decorative table resting against the wall across from where we stand. We have several pictures lined up in custom frames—of Rowan and I, our parents, us as a family and then individuals.

I never look at those images anymore.

Too much pain. Too much neglect. Too much resentment.

“Is this your mother?” Na’amah bends at the waist, leaning closer to the second image of my mom and I alone. Her head tilts to the right slightly, as if she’s absorbing this new information with vested interest.

I don’t want to answer her, however. So, I turn on my heels and step up the staircase instead. “My room is up here. I’ll start gathering my things,” I reply, pretending I hadn’t heard her question to begin with. The floor creaks with my first step, and I’m surprised when sudden flashes of my last night with Rowan spring to the forefront of my head. I halt my paces, my chest quickly swelling in rapid breaths and my palms going slick as I tightly shut my eyes.

The feeling of his hands on my skin, his tight hold around my ankles as he tried dragging me down the stairs. The memories of past encounters and the things he would force me to say to him, force me to do in order to get him off.

Nausea rolls through my stomach and bile rises up my throat as I force it back down. I lay my other hand across my chest, rubbing my palm over my heart in absent hope it helps slow the pace.

“Tell me.” Na’amah’s abrupt and rough voice grazes over my ears like ice chilling my veins. I feel the swift winter of her body as she comes up behind me, the simple nearness of her surrounding me is filled with peace and possession. I cling to that, because now, it’s become a staple in keeping me calm. I can’t even believe we’ve made it this far in this short amount of time, but I’m grateful to have her safety as these nightmares run rampant in my head.

I know what she’s asking, and her hand suddenly reaches around from behind and slides over my jaw. Her thumb slips up, over my lower lip as she traces the gentle line and then moves into my mouth. She drags me against her form, pulling me tightly over her chest as her mouth falls down to the soft crease of my neck. Her nose drags along my skin and up into my hair. I can hear her breathing in, devouring my scent and I roll my tongue over her thumb.

She pulls out of me in the next moment though, bringing her lips back against my ear and revealing her intentions. “Ahh,” she whispers. Her fingers suddenly tightening around my waist as her spine straightens and the air freezes around us. “He won’t touch you again, Skilla. I’ll rip every limb from his pathetic, lifeless body before I let him get his hands on you.”

My tongue. Her ability to gain vague knowledge of my thoughts and emotions through any water-based substance. How she touched me, even though overflowing with sexual tension and desire, was intentional in her attempt to understand my concerns and fears. The way her body presses against mine, in the hold she keeps on my frame as she urges me up the staircase, are all reassuring reminders of how she’s integrated herself into my life.

In spaces where I’ve hated her, where I’ve been afraid and angry. I realize she shows small pieces of her vulnerability more often now, and I can’t help but wonder if I’m slowly breaking through those walls she’s built so highly around herself.

Remembering the small comments she makes every so often, words that catch me off guard and are laced with such a deep, esoteric emotion lingering underneath. Those are the moments I crave from her.

With being this close, she so clearly protecting me like this causes my stomach to flip and my heart to beat with the connection flowing between us.

I want to believe her when she says this is different.

But if I admitted to that, it would change everything. My plans for escape. My will to fight against her. Hell, it's already crumbling, but I can't let go of that completely just yet.

"I know," I reply quietly as I breach the top of the staircase, replying to her easy and confident threat of Rowan. A part of me wants everything she promised in those words, and a wave of guilt runs over me briefly at the sick idea of wanting him dead.

It's quickly forgotten however when I round the corner and my eyes fall to newly replaced door to my room. The holes in which he splintered the wood and beat it with his fists are now gone. The blood smearing those places, the doorknob caked with his fingerprints, the very obvious and terrifying relics of what he was planning on doing to me that night are completely erased.

Rage flashes under my skin and boils my blood. Of fucking course he would change the door out. Sure, it could purely be for aesthetic purposes, who wants to look at a broken, bloodied door for days on end? But I know the truth, I know him far better than to think he didn't replace that door right away in order to avoid the images of what he was capable of.

He knows he's a fucking monster.

And he enjoys every moment of it.

I push forward, intentionally avoiding the feelings building inside of me and open the door to step into my room. Everything is the same, completely untouched, and I try not to let that bother me even more. *Such a perfect little illusion he must enjoy living in.*

In the next moment, I jump at the loud of sound of something cracking behind me. When my head snaps back, I find Na'amah, her fingers white knuckling the door as she rips it from it's hinges and drops it on the ground outside my room. The door frame splinters, the gold hinges hanging lopsided off the edge with broken screws having fallen to the ground below.

I watch her in silence, and she doesn't say a word either. She casually brushes her hands down the front of her thighs as she looks at the broken door with a smug expression crossing her face. When she finally turns back around to face me, she pauses, her shoulders squared my direction and her cold eyes showing nothing but absolute impassiveness. As if there isn't a single thing wrong with her breaking doors and damaging property.

It's a good thing I tend to agree.

I nod my head slightly, an unspoken thank you passing between us before I turn again and begin rummaging through my dresser. "What do I need for the event tomorrow?" I ask without glancing behind me, searching for anything remotely upscale I can wear. Thankfully, I have several dresses in my closet; my mother loved extravagant clothing whether I wore it or not.

"You'll wear what I've picked for you," Na'amah replies flatly as she moves to the nightstand beside my bed and pulls open the drawer. It's only full of junk and small trinkets, but she begins digging through it none the less.

"Absolutely not. Knowing you, you'll probably dress me in a paper bag." I quip sarcastically, knowing she'll use any opportunity to make me uncomfortable.

"I would never dress you in a paper bag and hinder everyone's ability to see you. That's ridiculous." She responds as if my comment is absolutely absurd. "However, we do need to discuss a few things in regard to what will happen tomorrow evening." This time, her voice quiets slightly, and shockingly warms the space between us. It surprises me so greatly that I pause with a small gathering of loosely fitted tank tops and crops, and turn to face her.

She's watching me intently, no longer rummaging through my things but leaning back against my bed and resting with her arms crossed over her chest. I can't help but notice the way her jeans pull tight across those powerful thighs, or the ways her arms dip and swell with the sharp lines of her muscles. She's masculine and feminine all at the same time, and I can't help but acknowledge how attractive I find that. My eyes fall lower, resting on her thick, black boots peaking over her jeans. When I move up again, my gaze scan the white blonde strands of her hair so tightly tied on top of her head, her electric blue eyes powerfully watching me watch her.

The sharp line of her jaw, the ripple of her lips and the way her tongue slowly slips out and along her bottom one.

Fuck. That shit was on purpose. "Stop," I say out loud, knowing exactly what she's trying to evoke from me. I know I'm right the second one side of her lips rise in a quick, arrogant smile.

"You're easy to play with, Kitten." Her voice is lighter than anticipated, still dripping with a sensuality I've never experienced

anything like before. “But before I fuck you today, we have serious issues to discuss. Things you won’t understand, but I need you to keep an open mind and listen.”

My cheeks heat and my chest flushes with the invasion of images in my mind of her doing exactly that—fucking me. But the way she speaks now has my spine straightening and apprehension lingering in my thoughts. I can feel the weight of what she’s approaching and confusion rips at the already strained ideas I’ve already had to grow accustomed to. “Well, ten days ago I didn’t think Vampires or Hell actually existed so, you might as well lay it all on me now.” My words are thick with sarcasm, and I can immediately feel the way it turns her off to this conversation. Her eyes narrow and she leans back just slightly, crossing one leg over the other in silence as she awaits my changed temperament. “Sorry, sarcasm is my defense.” I admit quietly, slightly embarrassed and yet a bit turned on at her immediate authoritative reprimand with just her energy and demeanor.

“Not today. Today, you’re present, you’re open, and you listen to the words I’m going to speak to you. This is for your knowledge and education just as much as it is for your own safety as well, Kitten. I need you to pay attention.” She uncrosses her arms and runs her palms down her thighs, leaning forward and raising her eyebrows as if she’s urging me to agree and submit.

“Yes, Alca.” The words falling from my mouth come freely and easily, more so than I anticipate. Even saying that name has my pussy throbbing and wetting as I watch her. Na’amah’s jaw ticks, just once, and her eyes flare briefly at my response.

I’m affecting her just as strongly as she affects me. My chest swells with pride and the revelation of my own power here.

I lean back against my own dresser, tucking my small pile of clothes against my chest and softening my eyes as I ready myself for whatever she’s about to say.

“Our people, our race, have been around for eternity. Fallen Angels, Demons, the Omega, and Arcadia. Every religion derives from a single origin, taking on their own twists and characteristics to make their own. They don’t get everything right, but as you know, my sisters and I—the Queens of Hell—are all Vampires. Have the other girls told you how that

came to be?” Her eyes remain stoic, but a flash of nostalgia runs through them and disappears just as quickly.

“No,” I reply, trying to remember all of the pieces I’ve been given this far. “I don’t know those details.”

“It began at the very beginning of the Great War, when Lucifer was also an Angel to the Omega. Lilith and Lucifer had a...unique history, one I won’t go into detail regarding. But once the Omega cast Lucifer to Hell, he cursed Lilith as well. My sisters and I stood beside her, fighting by her to remain in Arcadia, but the Omega wouldn’t tolerate what had happened with her and Lucifer. We were all cursed and cast to Hell, our abilities now serving as benefits to what we’ve become. But it wasn’t always like that. We’ve had to learn and hone these powers, control them into ways that help us rather than destroy all around us. This is why Lilith can no longer feed from Lucifer, or other human bloodlines that do not contain celestial blood. *That* was her greatest curse amongst the others. We’ve always been labeled as what humans call Vampires, even as Angels in Arcadia. But our curses now lie in where we remain, being exiled from Arcadia, and the powers we hold. As well as one other great curse for what we believed the five of us—including Lucifer—held.” She takes a deep breath and pauses, assuming I can have a moment to process what she’s explaining. She speaks so logically, and in that regard, it’s almost easier for me to digest than if it came from someone as theatric and passionate as say, Aggie. I nod for her to continue, struggling to compartmentalize everything I’m hearing but eager to push forward. “There is a type of connection that benefits the Fallen. A tether if you will, between those who are linked to celestial blood, often times Fallen Angels. They are referred to as the Fated, however, it is incredibly rare and these types of connections have not surfaced in decades until very recently.” Her words slow as she enunciates everything clearly, as if this is the most crucial piece of information she’s offered me.

“Fated. Between Fallen Angels, so you and another Vampire? Or someone else entirely?” My gaze narrows and for some reason, it feels as though a knife is slicing through my stomach and ripping me in two. Is she trying to tell me that she’s Fated to someone? Brielle? Fuck. She isn’t a Fallen Angel, so I don’t think it would be her. But that means it would be someone I’ve never met before.

“No, see, a Fated connection was also stripped of us when we Fell. The Omega deprived us of this as punishment to our association with Lilith and Lucifer’s wrongdoings. So, none of my sisters nor I have found our Fated’s,” she explains with heavy disappointment weighing down her words. But as relief spreads through my chest, she sighs in what sounds like exasperation and continues speaking. “Until recently. When we realized there was a possibility that we have the ability to unite our Fated bonds.”

My brows pinch in confusion. What the fuck is she trying to say now? My heart beat quickens and I hold my clothing just a little tighter as I wait in anticipation of what’s coming. How do I remain in that place, in the Underworld, feeling the ways I do about Na’amah and knowing she’s connected to someone else in this way?

“What are you saying exactly? What does this Fated connection mean?” I ask, surprised by the hesitancy I feel in her energy and body language. She’s leaning back again, her eyes remaining on me but just a bit more detached than usual.

“Years ago, these were the rulers of our Fallen race. Fated connections are unlike any other. Two souls connected by blood and magic, the ability to feel everything your partner experiences, sense danger in each other. Communicate without words. Heal each other, combined and enhanced abilities once connected. The possibilities are endless. But once wars began breaking out amongst Demons and Fallen Angels, the Fated were wiped out altogether, slaughtered in hiding in order to gain control of an entire race. This is an ongoing war we are still fighting, continuously suffering from. Altogether, the Fated pairings died out entirely, and eventually, stopped surfacing in our race. It was a natural digression, the magic running dry in order to avoid continued murders.” Her words are full of acceptance, as if this grief has already been processed years ago, and is now a sacred piece of their history. I can only assume that because Fated pairings no longer emerged, this portion of their curse wasn’t as significant. Until now, until it’s becoming another aspect to their current reality and the possibility they could experience this for themselves.

I can only imagine how badly they must want this. I can understand that, being completely owned and aligned with another person. Your other half.

Knowing you are fully chosen by someone else.

No rejection.

No second choices.

No abandonment.

My heart hurts for this, craving that connection I so desperately want to experience with someone else.

“Okay,” I breathe out, surprising myself at how calm I’m remaining. I stay grounded in the easy sight of Na’amah, of the sound of her voice and feeling of her wintry atmosphere surrounding me. Living in the Underworld for last week has me realizing it may not be so insane to fathom a world with Demons and Angels and other supernatural beings. “So what exactly does this mean? Have one of your sisters found their Fated?” I have a feeling she’s actually talking about herself, but I’m too afraid to ask that directly.

I don’t want to hear her say yes. Maybe this is why she’s been so distant since we were together.

“No,” she admits with heavy and drawn out sounds. “My sisters have not experienced their Fated connections.” Her jaw ticks again, her gaze somehow growing even more intense and predatory than it usually is. My heart is racing, and I absently twist my fingers against my skin while biting my lower lip as I try to remain unaffected.

“Okay,” I start, forcing the words up and through the deranged lump in my throat that continues growing with each tensely passing moment. “So you’ve found your Fated then?” God, that was painful to fucking say, and I want to close my eyes so I don’t have to watch her as she tells me the truth.

She doesn’t speak at first, but I hear the quiet sounds of her rising from my bed and moving toward me. The slow, heavy footfalls of her boots over my carpeted flooring sound in ways that I feel in my blood and under my skin. In a moment, she’s up against me, and I feel the cold of her skin pressing up against mine as my back is pushed hard into my dresser. My shoulders tremble in energy coursing between us, it’s thick and heavy, disappointment and rejection hovering around me like shadows waiting to come to life.

I don’t want to fucking hear it. But we’re again, and I’m familiar with this dark space.

Suddenly, her hands are removing the clothing I’m holding for dear life to my chest. She pulls them out of my hold and I reluctantly release

them as she drops the pile to the floor. She moves up against me entirely, her chest pressing hard over mine as I breathe and feel us brush together. She's fucking powerful, and I keep my eyes closed as her hands move to the strands of my hair. I can feel her running her fingertips over the ends, and I brave a small peek when I see her lift them to her nose and breathe in. She's watching me, her eyes attentive and wide when she grips my left wrist and slowly drags it up between us. Pressing my palm to her chest, I feel the slow and steady beat to her heart, thumping in a subtle rhythm that somehow sings over my own skin.

"Do you ever feel anything at all?" I ask, wishing I could hold half the peace and dismissiveness she holds in these moments. My heart is verging on an attack, sputtering out and dying completely when she's near me.

"I feel everything. All of the time."

Her voice takes on a quality I've never seen her reveal to me anymore. It's vulnerable, brimming with revelation and surrender as I slide my hand up over her own jaw. She lets me, and that alone takes me aback. I let my fingers explore, relishing in the cold she emanates, finding comfort and safety in the feeling of her body against my own.

I don't want to speak or ask questions, anything that could derail us from this quiet and heavy moment we're sharing together. My fingertips move gently over her lips, braving the lines and sensation of her breath. I shift up, over her cheek bones and then closer to those eyes alight with her own curiosity. She's watching me, observing just as intensely as I am with her. My thumb grazes her eyebrows, slipping around the edge of her eyes and then moving back toward her hair.

Pausing here, I look to her eyes again, gauging her reaction as I run my touch over the soft sides of her head and then up, into the long strands she always wears tied on top. "You never put your hair down?" I ask quietly, hoping this flows easily into our current exchange without disrupting it.

She doesn't respond at first, but when she does, I can hear the clear strain in her voice. "It's my own way of protecting myself, in a sense. Leaving it down felt too vulnerable, made me too approachable in what felt like weakness. I needed to be strong enough to protect my sisters, our Kingdom. I've always been the warrior, and letting it down reveals pieces of me I don't want available for anyone else."

I listen to her words, to the soft attribute her tone takes as she towers above me. It's like I can almost feel her words on another level, something

deeper, far more intrinsic than just speaking them out loud. She never gives me this much, and I'm not surprised it's taken me this level of intimacy in a non-sexual way to feel her practically inside of me like this.

So, I inch my touch up even higher, moving incredibly slow in order to allow her the space to stop me if needed. I don't know why I want this from her, but I do. Maybe claim one thing for myself before she's owned by another in their Fated bond. My fingertips graze the single tie which holds her hair up into that familiar knot. Na'amah's eyes shut, her long lighter lashes splaying over her cheeks as her chest suddenly rises in a single breath.

The air cools again, turning almost frigid and I feel my body begin trembling in the space she's pinning me in. But her hand moves to my waist and drags me even closer, somehow melding us together while she allows me the time to work the tie free of her hair. I settle considerably, allowing the blend of my heat and her ice to join in a comfortable energy moving easily through us. I've never felt this before between us, and I'm falling so deeply into the presence of this peace I don't want to let go of.

Bit by bit, her hair frees itself just slightly. I press my fingertips to it, working it loose until it cascades down and around her face. Her eyes continue remaining closed, but I gasp slightly at the sight before me when she finally opens her eyes and meets mine.

There's something on fire within her, licking through her irises and sparking against my body. I feel it, this sudden burst of something powerful between us, and as I slide my fingers through the short strands framing the right side of her face—I'm awe struck.

She's stunning. In ways that are both powerful and passionate. She's this enticing, magnetic blend of what's beauty and fight. Strength and compassion. So many aspects she's never shared with me before.

Her hair is straight, white blonde over her creamy skin and such a stark contrast to her bright blue eyes. It's short, but falls down to almost her jawline when not tucked neatly on top of her head.

"I love it," I whisper, feeling the soft strands slip against my fingers as I continue touching it and watching her.

But she's watching me silently and when I finally look to her eyes again, I'm struck in what feels like absolute possession by her.

"Tell me this is different," she finally speaks, taking my hand in hers and halting my touch. "Tell me you haven't ever felt this before. Not with

any of those girls you've wasted time with in the past." Her gaze searches mine, and features sharp and alert as she demands this. "I know about them. I can feel your past when I touch you. Even when you're slick with arousal, when I know all you can do is think about me being inside of you. I still know you've experienced something painful and yet powerful with someone else."

"I can't let this be different, I can't acknowledge that." I admit, feeling the sting of my own rejection working through me. Especially now that I know there is a chance I could lose her to her Fated. "And now that I know there is a chance you could be Fated to someone else?" Shaking my head, I try to pull my hand free of her grip. "Never. I will never let myself completely surrender to this."

"I've already found my Fated," she replies, tightening her hold as she lifts my inner wrist to her lips. She pulls back just slightly, enough to let me watch as her fangs descend and her tongue slides over the tips of them. Everything inside of me turns hot, sticky and slick as my core pounds while I watch her. It's overwhelming how quickly my body reacts to her so naturally, even her vampirism, as if that is already built into my DNA as my addiction. "You would never lose me to someone else, Kitten."

She drags her fangs along the sensitive skin of my inner wrist, her tongue pressing over my rapidly increasing pulse. Her other hand slides between my legs, her knuckles dragging over my jeans as disappointment floods me in being able to be touched by her like I'm envisioning now. But she already knows, and her fingers are unzipping me before sliding under the waistband and over my clit. She groans against my skin as she bites me gently, her nose brushing the same place as she breathes in. "Do you know why?" she asks, and the quiet, terrified answer reveals itself at the back of my mind.

But it's impossible.

There's no way. I'm not a Fallen Angel. I'm an average, normal girl from the city. I'm a stripper. I come from a shit family, and a shit line of ancestors.

There's nothing special. If I know anything for sure, it's that.

"No," I reply, not wanting to even give myself to the potential hope of what this could be.

"Yes you do," she responds, her tone sharp and husky over my skin. Her fingers slide lower through my pussy, circling my opening as I widen

my stance and my hips roll forward uncontrollably. I want more of her touch, her fangs, her Bite. I want all of it, coursing through me until she's become every bit a part of me as I want to be of her.

"That's not possible," I whisper as she pushes inside and my fingers quickly grip the back of her neck while I steady myself.

"You have some sort of celestial blood in your history, whether it's Angel or Demon blood, I'm not sure. But I knew it the moment I met you, it's why I came back to steal you when I shouldn't have." She sinks inside my pussy, going deep and slow before pulling out and thrusting inside again. I'm already losing my strength to feel of her fucking me, to the way her eyes are devouring my body as she claims me.

I'm moaning, small whimpers escaping my lips as my hands fight to roam over her body. I want to touch her, to feel her just as she's feeling me in this moment. I drop down to her waist, struggling to keep my focus as she pumps in and out of me in a slow, languid rhythm. She's fucking teasing me, because I know how she can fuck me and she knows how badly I need it from her.

But in the next instant her other hand is yanking my jeans down over my ass and thighs, her heavy boot stomps between my legs, shoving them down around my ankles so she can move quicker in side of me.

Fuck, she feels so good, and I'm desperate to know how this is affecting her now as well.

I don't ask, but I meet her eyes head on as I slowly unbutton the top of her jeans. She watches me, not speaking a word of refusal as she slides through my arousal and coats my clit with my own cum. I unfasten her jeans and slide my hand incrementally lower, feeling the sweet softness of her skin. I'm craving it, suddenly eager and filled with my own desperate desire to go further.

But it's then that grips my wrist and stops my movement, leaning her face even closer to my own, her lips brushing against mine as she whispers heated words. "I haven't let anyone touch me in years. I control every aspect of every encounter. I don't give anyone these pieces of me." And then her hold changes drastically, shifting from restraint to encouraging my touch. She pushes my hand down the front of her jeans, surrendering to this just as I am.

If there is anything that has proven exactly how this connection is different, it's these moments right now. "I know," I reply, sliding down

until my finger meets her clit and she breathes out over my skin. I whimper at my own touch, needy for more as she begins fucking me faster and harder. I want to be naked, stripped of every barrier between us so that we can connect.

“Tell me what this is then,” I say frantically, consumed by wild energy whipping around us. I move lower, feeling just at slick and wet she is between her thighs. I move through her pussy, imagining the way my fingers will feel as they slide inside of her and she stretches around me. “Tell me what I am to you.”

Her hips roll forward as I move over her opening, and she fucks herself on my hand as a deep moan falls from her mouth. I swallow it, every sound she’s giving me because I want everything I can possibly take from her now. I want to fuck her, get her on her back like she’s done with me, feel her come on my touch while she writhes beneath me.

I want her to break. After everything she’s done to me, I want the same from her.

“You’re my Fated,” she replies softly, saying the word with such passion I haven’t heard from her before. Her other hand suddenly grips my throat, holding me against the dresser as an orgasm builds inside of me. She drops her fangs to my throat and for a moment, I think she may Bite me, give every single aspect I could ever want all at once. “My other half. The connection my soul has always longed for.”

I can hardly believe it, but her words rip through me as I work higher and higher to my own release. I pull out of her and pump inside, watching her tits shift with every thrust and listening to the breathy words she satisfies me with.

“Fuck, you feel so good, Skilla.” She says, her tongue licking along my collarbone before gripping the neckline of my shirt and yanking it downwards. “The way you fuck me, the sounds you make while I’m deep inside of you. Everything is different.”

I want to respond, but when I open my mouth everything changes.

All at once. In a wild, chaotic storm that shatters the safe space around us.

Before I even know what’s happening, my hand is ripped from Na’amah and she’s throwing me back so roughly that my head smashes against the hard surface of the wall and my vision goes black for a moment. When I come to, I frantically yank my jeans back up my legs

before catching sight of Rowan, holding a gun in front of himself as he points it at Na'amah's chest. She's standing ahead of him, her hand splayed out in front of her, her spine straight and her shoulders wide with her attention focused purely on him. Her jeans are still undone, open at her waist but without a single ounce of care in her demeanor.

"You stole my little sister," Rowan speaks, his head tilted to the side as if he's simply curious of her. "My little pet."

My skin pulls tight at his sadistic tone, and I cringe over his words at the same time that a predatorial hiss spills from N'amah's mouth. "Do you have any semblance of self-preservation, Rowan?" She asks him, her own head matching his tilt, her steps inching forward subtly.

He scoffs, and I already know he thinks he has the power here. If it were just him against her, I'd feel confident Na'amah was safe. But the fact that his gun sits in his trembling hands has me terrified of the outcome in this situation. "There's something different about you, I can tell. Something sick and twisted. It doesn't surprise me that you were drawn to her." He nods my direction without meeting my gaze. "She's a little fucked up; a stupid little whore. But she does as she's told."

His words hardly affect me now, so familiar and comfortable I am when I hear them from him. But it's the way venomous Na'amah growls so fiercely in his direction that suddenly frightens me. Not for his safety, not at all, but for hers against that fucking gun. One moment and he'd pull that trigger. She isn't fast or strong enough to outrun a bullet.

Rowan's face suddenly changes at the sound of her growl, his eyes widening at the sight before he stumbles back just briefly. "What the fuck?" He stammers, and I glance back to her to see her fangs have descended fully as she steps closer once again.

"You're pathetic, weak nature has you raping and abusing your step-sister. Why is that, Rowan? How vile, how sick must you be to sleep at night so soundly, knowing every touch you steal from her is taken, never given." She moves again, and his eyes remain glued to her fangs as she does. "You do know that, don't you? She doesn't love you." Na'amah's voice drops low and hushed, her hand stilling in front of her as Rowan's hand grows even shakier. "She'll never want you. No one will. You'll grow up alone, imprisoned in your own mind of terrors and darkness. Because that's just it at the end of the day, isn't it? You'll never be wanted by anyone."

Rowan's lips part on a strangled cry of anger and rage. He's breathing heavily, and I can see the pure terror wracking his body as Na'amah nears him. I already know things are spiraling far too out of control, Na'amah is pushing him too far with a loaded gun waving directly in her face.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

I open my mouth to speak, desperate to come between them when I shift up onto my knees and move forward. But I'm not quick enough, and when the loud explosion from the gun suddenly rips through the air, I can only watch as Na'amah snaps into action. In an instant, that ice I know she carries detonates from her hand, rushing forward in a tumultuous burst that suddenly overtakes Rowan completely. From head to toe, it grows in icy spires at his feet, surrounding him in a cage of ice that locks him completely in place.

I cry out at the same time, watching as Na'amah stumbles back on her feet and clutches her chest. She's gasping, in a way that scares me to my very core. Quickly, she falls back on the floor, and I immediately crawl to her, coming over her slender frame as she falls back against the side of my bed.

"Na'amah," I cry out, my eyes rushing over her body and inspecting for any injuries. I'm quick to find her hand clutching her stomach, her fingers caked in blood that seeps from her clear wound. "No, no. This can't be happening. Tell me what to do, how can I fix this?" I frantically say, looking to her eyes as she watches me in silence. God, she seems calm, so completely focused on me while blood dangerously flows from her wound.

"I need blood," she replies, her words spill in jagged syllables and her breathes come in rapid strokes. "From one of the other girls."

"No, you can use me," I say, offering my wrist and lifting it quickly to her lips. But she yanks her head away from me, hissing as her fangs scrape over her lower lip. "Please, Na'amah. I can't get one of the other girls for you here."

"No," she growls out, her tone so loud and strangled it vibrates through my bones and startles me. "My sisters will know; they'll be here soon. They'll feel this."

"You're kidding me, right? Let me give this to you, please. I'm begging you. Use me to heal yourself, Na'amah." I launch forward again, lifting my wrist back toward her when she uses her free hand to shove me

back. God, she's still so strong when she's like this, and a furious rage washes over me at that fact. "For fuck's sake, Na'amah! Give me this!" I have the sudden idea to find something I can use around my room. I quickly glance to the left and right, scanning the ground for something sharp.

My eyes catch the edge of something shoved underneath my dresser. I drop to my stomach and slide my hand toward it, patting around until I feel the narrow object under my fingers. I yank it out, gripping the pen tightly as I sit back on my heels and quickly unscrew the tip. I drop the pieces out of it—the ink cartridge, the spring, and leave the tip off. Na'amah's breaths are becoming heavier, thick with something sounding wet and sticky while she watches me.

"What the hell are you doing, Skilla?" She asks, moving to sit up slightly but immediately flinching in pain.

I don't answer her, instead, I tightly grip both ends of the pen and bend harshly until it snaps. Sharp, jagged edges of plastic are formed on either side. My lips rise in a knowing grin, accomplishing exactly what I was intending to. It's in that next moment I lift my wrist take one half of the pen in order to press it against the thin, sensitive skin there. Before Na'amah can ask what's happening, I dig the sharp edge into my flesh, dragging it horizontally until bright red blood seeps from the wound and spill across my arm.

Another catastrophic shift in our dynamic alters the already disastrous space between us, and my eyes snap up when I hear the sudden excruciating groan from Na'amah. Her lips pull back in a fierce growl, the sound practically shaking the space around us as her eyes go wide and black veins hastily erupt over her eyes and down her cheeks.

"Na'amah—" I shout, lifting my arm at the same time she lunges forward from the bed and throws her fist forward. A wall of ice envelopes me, throwing me backwards so powerfully that I slam against the wall once again. I try to move, but I'm pinned still, sharp tines of ice covering my chest and arms as they secure me tightly to the wall at my back. Everything is frozen, so incredibly cold as I'm held tightly in place and that blood dries over the flesh of my wrist. "Let me go," I snap, as my eyes meet Na'amah's on the other side of the room.

Hers are different. Wildly so. Black orbs of complete and total ravenous hunger radiate outwards.

Her chest is heaving with every agonizing breath. The sounds she now releases are strangled and her teeth grind behind her fangs as she fights to hold herself back.

I can see the war raging around her, practically feel it billowing between us. A rage I've never known overtakes her and spills into the atmosphere around me. We're both livid, fighting for opposing ends of the same spectrum.

"Do not move. Do not breathe. Don't fucking speak." Her voice is dripping with poison, an animalistic sound that terrifies me. My lips slip shut and my own words are halted in my throat. I can only sit in this space of chaos, watching this woman, this Vampire, that has become everything to me, bleed away and die.

"You cannot let me watch this," I breathe out quietly. Trying to remain as still as possible as Na'amah cries out once again. "I can't watch you die. Do you understand me?"

"Stop talking," she says, and her teeth grit together as her back arches off the bed and she cries out.

An all-consuming pain rips through me, as if I can feel my insides splintering apart inside of me. I don't understand it, but I feel it all the same, wracking through my blood and screaming to be near her. In my heart, I feel it's the only possible way to fix this, and yet it's Na'amah herself that forces me away from her.

With every passing moment, the pain intensifies. It lingers, growing in waves of decimation in my body. Her eyes grow impossibly darker, her skin turning pale with those stark contrasting veins devouring more and more of her body as she remains away from me. My heart feels as though it will collapse, beating so quickly in my chest I wonder if that alone will kill me.

I'm not sure how long I'll survive this, my eyes fighting a war in itself to remain open and on the woman across from me. Deeper, more complex emotions and realizations work through me at the end, forcing me to face ideas and desires I wouldn't have before.

How badly I need her.

How much she has become such an integral, powerful part of my life and self-exploration of my strength. No one has challenged me in the ways she has, no one has angered me and frustrated me more in a single moment that she has.

No one has touched me like she has, spoken to me and drawn such intrinsic emotions from me like she has.

Not a single person has taught me and strengthened me like she has.

And now I'm losing her, before I've ever had the chance to truly live and breathe alongside her.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Skilla

“We don’t have time to discuss this.” Muffled words and hushed voices filter through my ears. “Binding is not a viable option. We’ve only seen Elijah, Nathaniel, and Leon bond to their Fated. We do not have enough current successful cases to determine the safety of this with a human.”

“She isn’t human, though. She has enough celestial blood to present this type of connection. She can survive this.” A softer tone, but none of these voices provide any sort of recognition for me.

“No. We’ve never had a Vampire unite a Fated bond, not recently. I refuse to endanger her like this until we know how feasible it is.”

“You feeding from other girls will cause her to suffer, Na’amah. How can you continue putting her through that?”

Ahh, the Queens. My mind is still heavy with fog, even while it clears slightly with awareness.

Na’amah.

I’m straining to remember my last few moments of consciousness.

A crash sounds somewhere in the room before a wave of ice runs over me. “It’s not fucking happening. Not when I can so easily kill her.”

“You won’t! Goddamn it, we will be there, we won’t let that happen.”

“We have far too much taking place tonight, too much riding on this event. Too many fucking secrets, we cannot tackle this at the moment as well.”

My breath hitches in my throat, my eyes vehemently struggling to pull open when my lips part and the sudden need for oxygen bursts in my

lungs. I launch upwards, finally gasping a deep breath and clutching my hand to heated skin of my chest. My eyelids open, and I twist my head toward the voices as I attempt gathering awareness of what surrounds me.

She's over me in the next breath, her familiar towering figure surrounding me in every sense of the word. Her arms are resting on the bed on either side of my shoulders, urging me to lay back down as my eyes slowly focus their vision on her.

That icy electricity, a current easily rolling between us and sparking along my skin.

And her hair, the strands are down and framing her face on one side. I reach forward, my slim fingers trembling as my body fights to become fully present. Touching them, memories instantly flash across my mind of being at my home in the city.

Touching her. Seeing her hair down for the first time as she let me in and revealed I was her Fated.

Rowan.

Na'amah. The gun. Ice. Blood.

Fuck, all the pain.

It all comes crashing back to me, flaring to life in my mind as my hands quickly grip Na'amah's face and drag her closer to me. I kiss her, without even thinking of the consequences, pressing my lips tightly against hers in a heady need to feel her alive and breathing into me. But just when I think she'll pull away, she leans in. Her lips moving over mine in hunger and thirst, devouring me while her tongue slips inside and licks over mine. She's just as needy as I am, breathing heavily between starving kisses as quiet whimpers fall from my lips.

I pull back, letting my fingers fall to her chest and then stomach where I remember gunshot wound. My eyes rake over her body for any signs of what happened at that place. "You are absolutely insufferable; do you know that?" I bite out when I thankfully find no signs of blood or injury. My gaze snaps back up to hers and my hands tightly hold the back of her neck. "Refusing to feed from me, refusing to let me heal you. How am I supposed to do this if I can't ever take care of you in the ways you do for me?"

"I will never risk your life like that. Not until we know it's safe for you. Not until we can properly bond and unite our Fated tether," she explains, her words just as protective and possessive as they were before.

Her hands move over my face and through my hair, tightening their hold as she wraps my strands around her fist and holds me still in front of her.

“When? When can we bind ourselves then?” I ask, unsure of what that exactly entails but willing to face this alongside her.

“Not tonight. We have far too much going on. Too many things we have to keep hidden.” Her thumb traces the heavy line of my lower lip and then sweeps over my jaw in a tender touch. “This, what we’ve discovered, we have to hide. Lucifer, the others in the Kingdom. They can’t know yet. Few of the girls have spoken to Lilith, only the ones she confides the most in. Fira, Thalia, and Sera.”

“Why? You said there were others?” I press her, my eyes narrowing as I lean into her palm resting against my cheek and settle against the comforting chill she provides.

“There are, and I can set up a meeting with you and the other seemingly human girls who have found themselves Fated if you’d like. Luna and Stella. They’re sisters. But the rest of the Kingdom assumes myself and the other Queens cannot be Fated, as well as Lucifer. There have been legislations and rules put in place regarding those we keep around us and if Lucifer can bind in a Fated union, it disrupts the pact he has in place with the coven of witches he currently controls.” I don’t understand everything she’s saying, but I can feel the intense severity her words carry.

“I’d love to speak with them. I want to learn what all of this means, what my ancestry holds that I’ve been unaware of.” I tell her, a quiet surge of excitement growing in my chest at this idea of potential alliance and... *friendship*. “I understand about hiding this for now. What does that mean in regards to this evening? Do I need to stay away from you, is that it?”

Na’amah’s eyes grow dark and grave, her walls of detachment slipping over her face and masking her emotions. “I’m afraid it’s bit more complex than that.”

TIME SEEMS TO BE MOVING FAR TOO QUICKLY. RACING PAST ME IN MOMENTS I’d like to cling to. Forget what the near future holds for me as I stand in

front of the long mirror in my bedroom, turning from left to right and taking in the details of the dress chose for me to wear to this event.

Long and tight, an absolutely stunning garment I could have never imagined myself. The entire fabric is an illusion of transparency, thin nude tulle that matches that tone of my skin. It's covered in thousands tiny gemstones and crystals in varying shades of white and blue. Each one is strategically placed to create palettes of what seem to be ice and snowflakes across my skin. Along my chest and arms, the crystals begin falling farther apart, until they are simply dispersed smatterings of sparkles dancing over me.

The fabric clings tightly over my hips and thighs until it falls freely around my calves and ankles, cascading at my feet and over the light blue crystal heels I'm wearing as well. I run my hands over the dress, feeling the tiny gems press into my palms and glow in the dim lighting of my room.

I love it. Truly, I do. It's a shame it'll be worn on a night such as this. One where I won't be able to fully enjoy it in the presence of what's about to happen.

My heart sinks and my stomach twists with anticipation. I'm not sure how I'll handle all of this or feel about it in the moment. I'm thankful Na'amah shared her plan with me ahead of time, but it won't numb the humiliation I'm about to endure in front of countless people. The expectation and wish for this to be over already becomes the overwhelming emotion running through my head.

Suddenly, my door cracks open, the gentle whine of the creaking wood catches my attention. I turn, holding my breath in hopes that it's Na'amah coming to say goodbye before we pretend to be something else entirely for the night.

But disappointment floods me instead when I see the Fira come into view. "It's time," she says, offering a kind but sad smile as her eyes fall over my attire. "You look stunning, Skillia."

"Thank you," I reply, attempting to keep my voice steady and brave. "A shame I have to wear it on a night like this."

"It'll be best to wear tonight," she whispers, her eyes suddenly alight with mischief. "A painful reminder of what has to happen to keep everyone safe, but you'll look phenomenal doing it." Her shoulders shrug

and her head nods just slightly. “She’ll be stunned speechless with your beauty before it all happens.”

“I was hoping she’d come say goodbye,” I admit, sighing heavily and stepping forward as I prepare myself to leave.

“Oh no, better to keep this a surprise.” She waves her hand up and down my entire figure. “Let her process and absorb in front of everyone.” She finishes with a wink before stepping out the door and allowing me to follow.

I stride through the Kingdom behind her, moving in tense silence while my mind works through every detail I know of this evening. I want to be prepared for every potential trigger, each emotion I’ll face and every pretense I’ll have to manage.

I can do this. I tell myself over and over again, knowing that when this is all finished, I’ll find myself back in Na’amah’s room and in her touch.

The muffled sounds of countless guests begin filling my ears as we move down the hallways. Decorations line every surface, torches alight with each of the Queen’s colors, flowers strewn about the floor in familiar fashion as well. I can only imagine what the actual ballroom looks like, and for a brief moment, a flare of excitement rushes through me for that reveal.

I know this will be stunning and I do love the way my long auburn hair is braided up on top of my head with few strands fallen down around my face. Thalia did my make up tonight, in soft blues and purples that surprisingly compliment my skin tone better than I anticipated. I was nervous for her to do something extravagant, the only experiences I could compare it to were overdone eye shadows and glitter from my nights at the club.

Shit, the club. Those days, those experiences have been so far from my mind with everything I’ve been exposed to now. But a swell of gratitude lingers in my heart when I realize I don’t have to go back there, I don’t have to earn money for the sake of Rowan, or for quick bursts of false validation from useless men.

And Rowan, fuck. Na’amah and the Queens told me he’d be dealt with. They wouldn’t reveal any details, and I can’t help but wonder if their version of *dealing with* means something far more deadly than mine would. But I choose to push that from my mind, I have other issues vying for my attention and focus tonight.

It's then that we finally round the corner that leads into the ballroom. My eyes immediately fall to the grand doorway, raking over the stunning veil of flowers hanging in the open space. Long strands of peonies, roses, ranunculus and daisies hang from nearly invisible strands I assume is fishing line. It's absolutely gorgeous, and my heart immediately leaps in excitement as I briefly what's coming.

Fira's hand slides through my arm, linking me up close beside her while we stride through the doorway. She's donning a uniquely beautiful black, lace and velvet dress that dips low in the front, exposing her chest slightly. Her makeup is also done, but her smokey eyes are shaped like wild wings with crystals speckled in various places over her skin.

Together, we walk into the space full of crowded people. Three large and massively long, dark oak wooden tables are lined next to each other, with more matching chairs than I can I count on both hands. They cross in the back, but hold overflowing bouquets of white flowers and dripping greenery on each one.

More white strands of immaculate florals hang from the ceilings with countless lengths of candles interspersed within. God, I can hardly fathom it, even while I'm looking directly at this artistry.

"Stella," Fira whispers in my ear as she leans over. She nods to a bright redhead on the other side of the room. The woman stands in a small crowd of people, the clearly powerful and tattooed men towering over her and the other woman at her side. "She's the one who designed all of this tonight."

Recognition flashes through my mind at Na'amah's words earlier, realizing these must be the girls she mentioned to me. The ones who were human but found themselves Fated to Fallen Angels.

My attention is pulled away though when I hear the sudden crash of a glass shattering on the ground. My gaze whips right and I instinctively search for the source, but it's when my eyes firmly land on Na'amah's tall and stunning figure that my breath leaves my lungs entirely.

Our eyes collide, lashing through the large space and countless people as if they don't even exist. Searching for each other, devouring our souls with our eyes and energy. I want to breathe, inhale whatever oxygen I can that she shares as well. But I can't even move, I'm frozen in place, paralyzed by the way her eyes widen and flare with desire at the sight of me.

It's subtle, noticeable to no one else other than me. But fuck, I can feel it, and my core pools with arousal instantly.

She's wearing a suit, tight fitted white slacks with small-heeled black boots. Her blazer is white as well, a slim fit and light blue long sleeve tucked underneath. Her hair is braided into three slender lines on top of her head, leading into one knot resting in the back. The sides of her head are newly shaved, with another design of frost and snowflakes cut intricately into the fade.

She's otherworldly. That electric blue stare now glimmering with a hunger I can feel deeply from here. Her fangs slip free and practically beg for my fucking attention as I watch her.

I'm consumed. Already. I can't even imagine what being bonded to her through our Fated connection could possibly feel like in comparison to this.

But she's the first to break eye contact, pulling away from my gaze and giving her attention to another.

Brielle. Dressed in black as Lilith's colors even though she's stepping up beside Na'amah. She's still so entranced by her. I can tell.

I know what that kind of love looks like now.

I want to dismiss this as nothing, just as I know it is. But when I see Na'amah's hand lift and rest on the small of her back as she whispers something in her ear, I can't help but feel that sting of jealousy crack through me.

"Remember what tonight is about," Fira states at my side, tugging on my hand in order to pull me in the other direction. I'm the only one wearing blue tonight, a clear sign that I'm here with Na'amah despite her indifferent behavior.

I don't have a response, because it's unnecessary and I want to focus on other things while Fira brings me to the farthest table where her and the other girls are seated. I can mingle here, wait for the first course when I'll find my seat beside Na'amah and the other Queens. Lilith also has one of the girls seated beside her, and we'll ideally move through the evening with light conversation until it's time for Na'amah make her move.

My head turns toward the door as the sound of heavy, sharp footsteps snap through the room. Everyone falls silent, and the tension thickens in the air around all of us as Lucifer enters the crowd with a woman following behind on his heels. She's slender with long, wildly beautiful

blonde hair cascading around her shoulders. They match, both wearing a mix of black and red in various forms.

He is covered in tattoos, from his neck all the way to the tips of his fingers. An arrogant smile pulls along his sadistic lips and as I glance around the room, I see everyone watching him intently. All have mixed expressions on their faces, but when I look to the small group with Stella and the others, I notice the veil of stark irritation in her eyes. She leans to the girl beside her with deep brown hair and whispers something unreadable.

When I search for Na'amah at the head of her table, I catch her briefly staring back at me, until she snaps her attention back to Lucifer as he draws near.

"Hello, hello, sisters," he says loudly, leaning down to press a kiss to Lilith's forehead before straightening himself and speaking to the others. He looks around the room once he realizes everyone has stayed silent, and lifts his hands in a mock bow to those surrounding him. "Please, don't stop conversing on my account. Let's drink and dine and fuck and forget about the shitstorm brewing around us, shall we?"

Everyone responds in various forms of agreement and then turn back to their previous conversations. I look to Fira, confusion pricking my mind. She must assumedly know what I'm curious of however, because she immediately begins explaining. "The outside war between Sunan and the Underworld and Fallen Angel race. She's responsible for killing off many of the Fated unions, and has one of the Fallen held hostage who is already bonded to a Demon named Leon. They've been searching for her, but aside from one chance sighting several months ago, they haven't been able to locate her."

Ahh, everything begins clicking into place and I thank her for offering the information so willingly before we continue conversing with the other girls. Every so often, I glance over my shoulder when I think I feel the icy breeze of Na'amah's gaze. But every time I look, I find her lost in conversation with another, or speaking to Brielle with hands gently resting on her figure.

Lilith is watching us as well, and I vaguely remember that I haven't seen Aggie in several days, let alone here at this event. I would have assumed she'd love being a part of this.

As the night carries on, everyone grows louder, more rambunctious and rowdy. Drinks are flowing freely in countless glasses, spilled wine and trays of liquor pass through the hands of practically everyone. I've stayed close with Lilith's harem, keeping my distance from Na'amah as much as I've been able to.

But it doesn't stop the enticing draw growing inside of me, especially with a couple glasses of wine I've indulged in. I've listened to Lucifer as well, taking note of who must be named Esme, the young witch at his side he very loudly and obviously owns. No matter where he is in the room, she remains close, his hands on her in one way or another. In fact, her throat is wrapped tightly with what I can only describe as a collar, a thick black band with a metal ring resting in the center.

Their dynamic is different, and I find myself having more and more questions as the night goes on. I want to say he holds all of the power, but I swear, there is something in her eyes that make me believe she's concealing a deadly weapon of knowledge.

Ironically, it's in the same moment everyone falls quiet. Lucifer's voice ringing over the crowd as he calls on Na'amah.

No, no, no. I'm not ready yet.

Fira's gentle touch runs over my hand, squeezing in reassurance as Na'amah stands and walks toward him. He rests at the head of the room, a throne sitting next to Lilith's while the two preside over the entire ballroom.

"Show me your newest project, sister." He speaks with a vile cheer lacing his words. I was told he finds joy in the pain and humiliation of others. It's part of the reason why Esme has had to remain at his side for so long now.

"She's nothing, Luce. Not worth the little show, I can promise you that." She scoffs, throwing back another drink as she tilts her head and swallows the amber liquid. My heart pounds at the easy lie falling from her lips, and I try not to let my own wash of alcohol rule my emotional reaction.

"Oh nonsense, you know I love a good girl. And I know the work you put into these little feeders for Lilith. Let's see how well this one obeys you, shall we?" His voice shifts into a command, one that sounds humorous but carries a deadly demand underneath. The room grows quiet as he tilts back his glass and pulls Esme directly onto his lap. She falls

easily, keeping her hands clasped over her thighs as he leans in and whispers in her ear.

So many private conversations taking place around me. Little secrets passed around like collateral, and I'm so curious to know what everyone's hiding.

She clears her throat and turns toward me, her eyes meeting mine in complete detachment and vacancy. It's like she isn't even there, completely lost to the darkness she's stepping into.

Terror shakes through me, the sudden uncontrollable feeling of being entirely alone in this. She can remove herself, her emotions so easily from what we're about to do and yet I will have to sit through them, feel every single one of her painful actions taken against me. I turn toward her right away, hoping I do everything right in order to get through this quickly and smoothly.

"Come here, Kitten." She snaps her fingers in my direction as I glide across the ballroom floor toward her. "Show Lucifer what a good little whore you are for me." My cheeks heat with a tinge of embarrassment. The icy, degrading words fall from her lips easily, and she slides her hands into the pockets of her slacks as her blazer pulls tight across her powerful shoulders. It's intimidating, the strength she so casually holds. I know exactly what those hands, what her words are capable of—that's what scares me most in this moment. I know what her goals are, but I don't know how she'll accomplish them. Her intent is clear, the path taken to meet those needs is not.

I walk toward her in silence, keeping my hands linked in front of my waist until I'm standing up in front of all of them. Literally everyone. They're all watching in the quiet heat as I present myself in front of the crowd of onlookers. Few whispered comments are spoken around me. The crowd growing antsy in what they anticipate seeing. I have a feeling this is all relatively normal for them, a show of entertainment that Lucifer isn't the only one enjoying.

Part of me is sick at the idea of that, another part wonders what else they so willingly watch.

Na'amah looks down at me as I keep my eyes low and to the ground. I see her feet step closer, those black pointed boots coming up to the hem of my dress. Her hand falls, her finger tips running over the thin fabric clinging to my hip as she slowly, gradually steps around me. I don't want

to look, but the way her hands trail their icy touch leave subtle remnants of her frost coating the decorative gems in her wake. Hell, even her every step leaves the smallest burst of frost spiraling out in light snowflakes.

It's magical. I'm completely entranced by the surprise and amazement of it.

Her touch glides higher, until her frozen finger tips are slipping over the nape of my neck and around my shoulder, until she's finally in front of me again and lingering over my collar bone. Then her touch moves higher, sliding up over the front of my throat until she's reaching my chin and forcing my face up to look at hers.

Dark orbs of toxicity reign through her. I see nothing of familiarity, feel nothing of our usual connection. I don't understand it. I somehow assumed that even through this, I'd at least feel what is truly her, what is ours, hovering just under the surface of every sadistic move she makes.

My brows pinch together slightly, confusion and discomfort quickly finding their usual homes in my erratic heart beat and clammy skin. Na'amah's grip on my chin turns into a angry hold over my jaw, nails digging into my flesh as my mouth falls open and she yanks me up against her chest. "Did you hear me, Kitten? You know I don't ask twice."

"Oh, oh, ask twice. Please do." I hear Lucifer chime out in mock humor from behind me. Na'amah doesn't even glance his way, keeping her focus completely locked on me.

"I'm sorry, I didn't hear you," I mutter as best I can, my heart soaring high in rhythm while sinking to the pit of my stomach at the same time.

Fuck, I've already messed this up.

She leans forward, her fangs elongated as they scrape over my ear lobe. "I said, get on your fucking—"

A crash takes place behind me, and Na'amah's attention is quickly thrown off without releasing her tight hold on my jaw. Her demand is interrupted, and I've never felt more relieved in my life.

"Dinner? Now? What poor timing." Lilith speaks, sarcasm dripping off her words and I listen to the sounds of scurrying feet and shifting chairs as I assume the first course begins moving through the crowd.

Thank fuck.

We can press pause on this and I can sit down, eat a few bites of food and calm my nerves before hopefully continuing this.

Na'amah shoves me away from her and toward the table. I stumble forward, but straighten my spine with as much dignity as I can manage before instantly halting my steps at the sound of Lucifer's dark voice behind me.

"Oh no, no. We aren't finished here." I refuse to turn around yet, my heart jumping back into that volatile rhythm as I desperately hope Na'amah can stop this for the time being. "If she is such a good pet for you, sister. Show me you feed her."

My eyes close in shattering disappointment. My mind wracks through every possible humiliating outcome this could lead, and terror paralyzes my ability to move.

"Better yet," Na'amah presses, her voice taking on humorous tone as well when I hear her steps click across the floor away from me. "Let me show you how I teach my newest Kitten to eat."

A boisterous scoff leaves Lucifer's mouth as my hands begin trembling in front of me. What the Hell does that even mean?

But then my heart plummets even lower, my eyes snapping open and my head whipping around toward Na'amah. "Lilith, allow me the use of your Brielle."

Lilith is quiet for a moment, clearly hesitating before she responds. But her brother is quick to chime in and offer his opinion. "Oh please, Lilith. You know how much I'll enjoy this. And you can fuck the sweet girl afterwards and remind her who she truly belongs to."

She nods in reluctant agreement, and I hear the scrape of another chair being pushed back as Brielle stands from a table in front of me. Everyone else is either seated already or hovering around their places, tensely watching the display taking hold in front of them. Brielle hurries toward Na'amah, walking directly past me without a single glance in my direction.

My stomach twists and rolls with nausea and jealousy, the sudden urge to submit more, be better than whatever it is Brielle can offer her consumes me.

I realize logically, she has done nothing wrong but fall for the same Vampire I have. I can't even blame her for that, but in this moment, I have a feeling Na'amah wants to use my jealousy to her benefit in dominance.

When I turn around, I find her standing directly in front of Na'amah, her head downcast as I'm motioned over to the both of them. "Come here,

Kitten. I want to you watch how good Brielle is for me. Learn how to please me like she does.”

Those words alone make me sick, and I hear the quiet clearing of a throat to the right of me when I quickly look that direction. Fira and Sera are standing close, their eyes shining with unspoken encouragements as they watch me.

I steel my shoulders, forcing a deep breath as I internally will myself to keep going. Walking toward them, I stop directly beside Brielle, meeting Na’amah’s hard gaze head on. “Of course, Alca.” I attempt keeping every ounce of sarcasm and irritation from my voice when I speak, but it’s difficult and clearly Lucifer notices because a quiet laugh escapes his mouth in the next instant.

“Bring me two servings,” Na’amah shouts to one of the servers mingling amongst the tables. I stand completely still, mimicking the stance Brielle holds in hopes that I’m doing the right thing. Hands clasped in front of my waist, eyes focused on the floor and not daring to look at any of Queens or Lucifer and his witch.

A scurry of feet come up behind me and to my side, handing two large plates to Na’amah as she takes them in her hands then steps back several paces.

“Brielle,” she begins, and my pulse beats hard at the sound of her name being spoken like this. It holds not only an air of dominance and ownership, but of passion and familiarity I absolutely loathe. “You’re always such a good girl for me, aren’t you?”

“Yes, Alca,” she replies, her voice quiet and meek with adoration. “I love being good for you.”

Annoyance sparks in my blood and I have to physically hold my hands still as they fight visibly trembling. I can’t help it, a cough spill from my throat as I focus all of my energy on remaining in control.

“Both of you, get on your hands and knees.” She demands, her tone laced with a possession I want only for myself. My eyes widen at what she’s asking, not believing she actually wants me to kneel in this kind of dress.

But before I can even consider refusing, Brielle is already falling into place, doing exactly as she’s told while I stand in defiance. Suddenly, everything moves so much quicker than I can process, happening second by second without time to decide what the best course of action truly is.

Na'amah immediately strides over to her, crouching down and placing one plate on the ground in front of her face. I watch in shock as her hand slips to the back of Brielle's head and she yanks her gaze up to meet hers. Na'amah's other hand moves to gently trace her lips, speaking to her and touching her in ways that feels so incredibly intimate.

Brielle watches her, her eyes open and focused on her owner completely. I feel as though I'm intruding, and the sight of this happening so casually in front of me has my heart ripping apart in two. "Good girl. Now show Skilla how to properly eat your food like the pet you are." Venom slicks her tone, seduction thick and heavy in her words. Brielle surrenders completely, even as Na'amah tosses her head away and then stands above her.

I'm still watching, my chest heaving with rapid breaths when Na'amah's eyes snap to my own. Arrogance and expectation run rampant in her expression, raised eye brows and crossed arms over her chest when she finally addresses me. "Watch her," she demands, nodding back down to the girl at her feet. "See how good she is for me? Will you ever measure up to what she gives me?"

I'm drowning, my skin pulling tight with heat of both sensuality and embarrassment. The ways in which she's forcing me to watch someone else please her like this, it's degrading. It's humiliating, and yet my soul beats and begs to do better.

I'm sick. Both anger and desire warring in my energy.

I step toward her without a word, coming to stand directly next to Brielle when I keep my eyes trained on Na'amah. I sink to the floor, grasping the hem of dress in my hands as I fall low to the ground. Hot, sticky heat floods my cheeks and flushes my chest. My pulse is rampant, thundering and skipping beats all at the same time. I try to steady my breaths, but my trembling hands, my shaking thighs make it incredibly difficult.

As soon as my hands rest against the hard floor below me, I drop my head so that I'm not looking at Na'amah. I see Brielle out of my peripheral vision, her mouth literally eating the fucking food off her plate without a question. I hear the muffled sounds of people gasping and chatting around us, even Lucifer leans forward as he watches with total fascination.

"How you treat them so poorly and yet they are so obedient is beyond me. How do you punish them, Na'amah? Do you convince them with fear

and pain? Or do you give into their emotional demands?” he asks, just as Na’amah begins pacing in front of me.

Click. Click. Click.

Her heels beat a rhythm I feel in my veins, mixed feelings of humiliation and desire blending into one.

“It depends on what they’ve done, Lucifer.” She suddenly stops and crouches in front of me now, slowly placing my own plate directly under my face. Her fingers linger there, dragging across the edge as she explains further. “This one has been difficult. Defiant and aggressive in her refusal to break.”

“Oh I can believe that.” He laughs, and I keep my eyes trained on the food below me. Some kind of fucking soup. Goddamn, soup. You’ve got to be kidding me. My shoulders shake in anticipation of what I’m about to do in front of all of these strangers. “She looks stubborn, a wild fight but I can imagine a wonderful fuck. Is that true, Na’amah?”

God, no. He is not asking about how I have sex with her. This cannot be real.

Na’amah hesitates before answering, remaining crouched low before me when she finally answers him. “Oh yes, you’d think so, wouldn’t you? The truth however, is that she’s a bore. The worst I’ve had actually, and I only kept alive because of Lilith’s need to feed from her blood.” Sick, sadistic words seep from her lips and poison the air around me. Everything shifts cold, and my back arches and then rounds as I fight to remain calm in the midst of this. “Brielle however,” Na’amah reaches toward her, lifting her chin and running her thumb over lips as she leans close. “She knows exactly how I like it, don’t you? Do you enjoy when I touch you? Do you come when I fuck you, my good girl?”

“Always, Alca. I love the ways you’ve claimed me.” Brielle’s sweet tone is desperate for approval and praise. It’s the last straw to my increasingly shortening temper before I snap.

In the next instant, I move to lunge forward, my hand lifting to slap Na’amah across the face when I’m suddenly shoved down and to the ground. I can’t even stop it, Na’amah’s fingers wrap so tightly around the back of my neck as she holds inches above my fucking plate. My arms are bent beside me, working hard to push me up and away from this, but I’m far too weak, and I’m at the mercy of Na’amah in front of all of these strangers.

“Oh my, oh my. What a perfect little project you have here.” Lucifer speaks as he stands and slowly strides toward us. He comes to reside next to Na’amah, and I absently think everything is spiraling out of control far quicker than I can process.

“She is, isn’t she?” she replies to him. Quiet groans are stifled on my grinding teeth and sealed lips. “At least she’s pretty when she’s on her hands and knees for me.”

“She’d be even prettier with those lips on my boot, don’t you think?” His voice shifts into something far darker than I’ve heard from any of the Queens before. This, this tone is dangerous. It’s a weapon all its own, straight venom injected into your veins and crawling under my skin like snakes.

“Lucifer, do not take this so far on such a night of celebration.” Lilith comes to my rescue, shouting from her own throne. He easily dismisses her however, and what threads of hope I have quickly disappear.

“Silence, Lilith. Everyone loves this,” he addresses the crowd. “Don’t you? Who wants to see this little slut kiss my boots before eating her dinner?”

“What a clever way to earn your meal, little Kitten,” Na’amah’s voice whispers near my ear. Her lips brush against me, and when I catch a moment to glance up at her, I’m met with black eyes of hunger and lust.

Holy fuck, she’s turned on. Eating this up in ways I’d like her to use on me.

“Place that sweet tongue on his boot,” she insists, shoving my head closer to his feet as he waits. “Show me what those lips can do, baby girl.”

I fight it at first, I can’t fucking help it. Pushing back against her hard touch when she uses her power to shove me forward further. My hand accidentally knocks against my plate, spilling some of the soup to ground below me as well.

Shit, shit, shit.

But my eyes and my mind are too focused on the nearing leather of Lucifer’s black, laced up boots in front of me. They shine under these lights, glinting in evil and vile power.

My lips part in a breath and I gasp as I try to inhale before coming in direct contact with his fucking boot. But I surrender, giving in to the ways my heart is racing in chest, to how slick my thighs are from my shockingly

wet core. The moment I realized how turned on Na'amah was, I paid more attention to the sick ways I wanted to submit for her as well.

In the next instant, my tongue slips out and over the hot leather, the musky taste on my tongue both disgusting and humiliating at the same time.

I pull back as quickly as I can, and Lucifer taps his toe in my face as his arrogance fills the space around us. "How good she can be when she submits, I must agree."

Shifting back, I assume I've completed my task. Relief washes through at the notion of this being it, finally I'm fucking done. But Na'amah's quick palm slaps across my face at the last instant, her own poisonous tone ringing through my ears. "Do not rest until you are told to. Now eat your fucking food, Kitten."

I raise my eyes to meet hers in astonishment, widening just slightly before snapping back down to the plate in front of me. She's still vacant, those black eyes still darkened and dominant as the sting of her slap heats my skin. I shift forward in submission, and I've completely forgotten that Brielle is still at my side. I can't even look at her, mortification has already built itself into my DNA now.

Moving toward the soup on my plate, I lean down again, letting my tongue slip out before Na'amah suddenly interrupts me.

"Not from there," she speaks simply, moving her own foot to the portion I spilled on the ground. She taps over it before gliding back. "There."

What the fuck.

My skin pulls tight, my nipples hard under the thin fabric of my dress. It's stretched over every inch of my body in this position, and I worry it'll tear if I push it much farther.

But I have no choice, and even while I hate every moment of this happening, that sicker part of my pussy and mind are working together to draw threads of pleasure and arousal from it as well.

I dip lower, my shoulders trembling as my tongue slides out once more and I slick it through the heady broth coating the ground. I savor it, licking it up into my mouth and over my lips as I eat. I strain to stay above the ground, taking what little sips I can so I can get this over with. But the immediate heavy feeling of a boot replaces the hold of Na'amah's hand on

my neck. I whimper, shifting my thighs together as my pussy pulses and I push back against the foot.

“Don’t even think of stopping, my Kitten. Eat it, I want to watch your tongue lick it up like honey. Show me how badly you want to come for me later.” Her voice is hushed enough for only myself, Lucifer and Brielle to hear her. It’s thick with sex and lust, rushing over my skin and straight to my wet and needy pussy. I want to be fucked, right now, right here, in front of everyone. Even as I’m forced lower, eating off the ground and licking my tongue through the broth, swallowing it down my throat—I still want her.

“Good, good. Soon enough, Lilith will be able to feed easily from her. Breaking these girls truly is your specialty, Na’amah.” I struggle to hear his words exactly, but I feel the way Na’amah’s pressure on my neck falters briefly. I’m still focused on doing as I’m told when chaos breaks around me, the sudden shouts of others in the room as something falls several feet away from me. Na’amah immediately yanks back and Lucifer turns on his heels, rushing toward the thrones when I lift my head and look.

Lilith has stepped off her throne, but collapsed onto the ground in front of her. Frantically, people race toward her, and I find the break in focus my first means of escape.

Escape.

Fuck. Everything changes, for the briefest moment. Flashes of memories regarding my plans to disappear from this place.

Brielle is already up on her feet and moving to Lilith’s side, concern etched into her features while everyone’s attention is focused elsewhere. So, I lean back and hurry to my feet, momentarily wondering if I should insert myself into the chaos taking place.

However, I don’t want to jeopardize the work we’ve done here tonight in this little display of ownership and humiliation. I can’t ruin the idea Lucifer has in his mind regarding how unimportant I am in Na’amah’s life. So, I turn around instead, rushing through the people as they move forward to watch whatever is happening with Lilith.

Using my elbows, I shove people aside, moving deeper into the crowds until I maneuver my way to the open door and into the hallway. I haven’t had time to truly explore yet, so as I look both left and right, I follow my gut instinct to push me further into the Kingdom. Taking a left, I race

down that hall, adrenaline pulsing through my veins as a narrow suddenly comes into sight in front of me.

It's familiar, and I swear I've seen it before at one point or another. So I move toward it, pushing down the iron lever and throwing it open as quickly as I can.

Fresh, night air assaults my lungs. I breathe in deeply, stepping outside in an incredibly intoxicating rush of exhilarating liberation. Fuck, I feel free and after everything I just experienced, the simply aspect of fresh air has me desperately seeking more. I let the door fall shut behind me, and I decide to disappear outside for the remainder of the night. I don't want to be in there any longer, and after what's happened with Lilith, I doubt anyone will be searching for me.

Stepping forward, I pause and lean down, taking off my heels and tossing them into the grass by the door. I don't want them, I only want to lose myself to being outside, to the soft feeling of grass under my toes.

To the silence.

I quickly become obsessed with the sudden relief of pressure and tension tonight. I'll stay out here as long as I can manage the quiet thoughts of truly escaping.

I don't want to escape in that way anymore. I've found a connection so intricate and powerful with Na'amah, one I am unwilling to let go of now.

Yet my feet continue taking me forward, stepping along the grass and enveloping myself in deeper darkness. The sky above holds those astonishing streaks of red light, vibrating through the night sky above me. I watch them as I walk, the chilly breeze working over my skin and through this thin dress. Lifting my hands, I run my palms up and down my arms in order to find some kind of warmth.

My mind spirals through everything that has happened tonight, replaying every moment, every word, every touch and stroke of attention Na'amah gave Brielle before me. Mixed emotions of jealousy spark along my skin, various outcomes of how I could have handled things differently play in my head. I know that's not how this works, but I can't help strangely questioning everything right now.

Before I know it, my eyes catch the sight of an even darker void approaching ahead of me. My gaze falls from the sky and I'm met with the tall, enormous trees towering into the night. Thick with a blackness I can't

begin to see through, a shiver of eerie and disturbing energy runs over my spine and across my shoulders.

I halt my steps, remembering what Na'amah told me yesterday. I can never enter this forest, for it belongs to Lucifer and if tonight is any indication, I know just how evil he can be.

So, as I turn on my heels and intend on starting back toward the castle, I'm paralyzed in place at the quiet voice whispering through the air. My head snaps up and in front of me stands the witch, Esme, her black robe covering her head and red, silky lining shining from underneath. I can see the ends of her hair below her shoulders, and her hands are quietly clasped in front of her.

When she looks up, I can't see her face. Only darkness resides where her head should be. "I am a conduit for Lucifer." Her voice is kind, but holds a slight tremble of fear as she speaks. "Please know, these are not my words, but his."

My head tilts to the side as I stumble back, a terrifying despair suddenly overtaking me. I can feel him, his energy, spilling from her form and radiating into me. Instantly, her hands fall beside her, palms facing up as her head drops back on her shoulders before looking to me once again. With the hood of her cloak fallen around her shoulders, I see her eyes perfectly clear in the night. They are entirely black, every ounce of them, dark orbs resonating an evil I can practically feel under my skin.

"And they thought they could hide you from me, did they?" Her voice takes on a volatile quality, as if it's a thousand voices all speaking at once. Pure, disastrous evil lurking in every word. "You must enter my forest, sweet Kitten. I hold the greatest gift you could ever want."

My spine straightens, my lips pulling tight into a line as I listen to him. I'm afraid, wishing so badly I could call Na'amah herself, or one of the others to come help me escape this.

"Do you think I am lying?" he asks me, taking a single step in my direction as I immediately move back.

"Yes," I reply quietly, continuing to keep my distance as he moves closer and closer.

"I am not. That is one thing I never indulge in. Lies. I know what it is you are truly seeking," he speaks, and strangely, I believe his words are genuine. He could have anything he wanted, force it however it may work without the use of deceit and lies.

“I need to find Na’amah.” I struggle to keep my voice steady and calm and I stumble for a moment when my foot snaps over a single branch that cracks under my step.

“She’s busy with her sister. You and I both need her there instead, don’t we? Otherwise, you’ll be the easiest meal for Lilith to indulge herself in.” He scoffs, a sick and twisted smile pulling along Esme’s face.

“Na’amah would never allow it,” I quip, slowing my steps when Lucifer finally halts his own pursuit of me.

“She would, because she would have no other choice.” His response is flat and dismissive, as if he’s finished discussing this topic. “You, however, have unfinished work to complete. And I have a gift.”

“A gift? Doubtful.”

“Turn around and look for yourself.” That crooked smile reigns free, somehow lighting those blackened eyes in arrogance.

I do as he says though, curiosity pulling in my mind as I turn and quickly realize how far I’ve moved away from him. “Fuck,” I mutter, lifting my gaze and looking up above me. We’re already surrounded by the woods, those trees towering over me in every direction, no sight of the entrance or exit anywhere near me.

Panicking, I turn back around, searching for Lucifer when I realize he’s gone.

“Oh shit, no. No, no!” I twist around, my bare feet crunching over the dirt and twigs underneath me. My eyes scan the area, desperately seeking out any possible signs of where I can go to escape. My mind quickly grows dizzy however, my breaths coming too rapidly to inhale effectively. I’m gasping, my heart racing in fear as I wish more than anything I could call on Na’amah.

In the midst of my turns and spiraling mind, I’m surprised when the sight of something glowing breaches the trees ahead of me. I catch quicksight of it, instantly moving toward the golden ring in hopes that it’ll give me some indication of where to go. But as I step closer, I realize it’s much larger than I first anticipated.

Golden and incredibly intricate, the circular ring encompasses a beautiful mirror.

“What?” I whisper out loud, noting the ways it levitates off the ground. My eyes search around it for any indication of how it’s being held there,

but there is none, and the ways my mind easily resolves it to magic astounds me.

I move forward cautiously, watching as my reflection easily comes into view. It's enormous, towering high above me before spanning wide on both left and right. Slowly, I lift my hand, letting it run along the deep grooves of the design carved into the frame. Florals, beautiful and detailed span around the entire mirror and the glass itself carries no marks of age or distress.

"Incredible," I speak to the silence around me. It's thick and heavy, and yet strange feelings of seduction breeze over my skin as well. My shoulders shake with a captivating shiver, rolling over my spine and heating my skin in its wake. My eyes roam over every detail, taking everything in before sliding over the center and truly looking at myself.

Me.

Skilla.

Kitten.

A Fated.

I smile, tilting my head to the side as I watch myself. God, I look beautiful. The sparkle of my dress shining so brightly in the darkness. It looks electric, almost as stunning as Na'amah's eyes when I look at her.

My skin is creamy and clear, a soft blush to my cheeks and stunning shadow over my eyes. My slender figure is somehow more attractive to me than I usually find it, and I twist around to appreciate the curves of my hips and swell of my ass in this tight dress. Lifting my fingers, I lay them against the glass, meeting my own reflection in the mirror as I watch myself.

"You are stunning," I whisper, looking deep into a pair of eyes that mimic my own perfectly.

And yet suddenly spark with a difference I can't quite name.

Cold. A breeze quickly flashes over my skin and I whip my head in the direction it came from. Na'amah, she must be close, and the immediate wash of relief practically overwhelms my senses. I step away from the mirror, decidedly moving in that direction in hopes that this is somehow the right move.

But my steps freeze immediately when my own voice breaks out behind me.

“Wait!” I hear my voice shout, scraping over my flesh and in my ears like a siren. “Don’t go yet.”

Slowly, tensely, I turn around, preparing my mind to meet whatever creature must be following me. But instead, my eyes only fall on my reflection in the gorgeous mirror at my back. I look around the area for any signs of someone else, but find nothing. Confusion wracks my mind and my brows pinch together as I narrow my eyes.

“Here,” the voice cheerfully states and that’s when I realize my own reflection is speaking to me. “Come here.”

Alarm collides through my chest as I stumble backwards, falling directly on my ass as I scramble away from the reflection of myself.

“Don’t be afraid,” she easily states, crouching low on her hands as she seems smaller and less intimidating. “It’s only me. And I’m you.” She laughs, but the sound doesn’t sound sweet or bring me comfort.

“What? How is this possible?” I ask, steadying my breaths and focusing on her. I inch forward, shifting onto my knees as I come closely up against the glass.

She smiles, every feature she holds matching mine perfectly and yet feeling different all the same. “How is anything possible here? Magic.”

“Magic.” I repeat, still struck in awe of what I’m witnessing. Another cold breeze runs across my shoulders, and my attention is pulled back as I look deep into the forest again.

“Not yet,” she whispers, moving closer to me as she sits on her knees. “She’ll find you soon. I promise you that.”

“How do you know?”

“She’ll scent your blood.” The words hold a weight of what feels evil and cryptic. How could Na’amah scent my blood when I’m not even— “How do you know she wants to be with you? With us?”

I narrow my eyes, my train of thought interrupted. “We’re Fated; she told me so,” I explain to myself, feeling somewhat crazy and intrigued all at the same time.

“Did she now?” she asks, her eyes turning suspicious and dark. “I heard her tell the other girls that as well.”

I rear back in disbelief. “No you didn’t, because I would have. You are me.”

“I’m the parts of you that you choose to ignore, Skillia.” She leans close, her hand lifting and slowly trailing her fingers over her own skin.

“The better parts. The smarter ones.”

“Liar,” I quickly snap, confused as a flash of irritation hits my chest. “You’re not real.”

“How am I not? I’m here, right now. Speaking to you just as any other. I know more about you than you choose to admit for yourself.” She speaks confidently, shifting onto her feet as she stands and continues watching me.

I stand as well, mimicking her own movements now as I step back and look for a means of direction. “No,” I whisper. Choosing to ignore her and find my way out of this.

“I’m the one who knows how badly you loved Ruby and K. How you so desperately surrendered to their sick and minimal touch in order to feel any sort of fucking validation. Right?” Her words turn sour, coming at me like knives into my skin.

“No, no, no,” I whisper, turning around and walking away from her. But she continues yelling from behind me.

“It’s pathetic, really. Tell me you’ve at least accepted that. How easily you spread your legs for them, and then went home to your brother and fucked him in the same breath?” She pauses as my steps falter, and new found rage begins boiling in my blood. “Have you admitted your darkest secret to Na’amah yet?” This time she whispers, but the perverse giggle she releases at the end leaves my skin crawling over my bones. I turn toward her, finally meeting her gaze and realizing she stands before me completely naked.

My eyes fall lower, observing myself in the mirror with a reflection that feels far more like my usual thoughts. My body is frail and slender, the outline of my ribs showing under my skin. I’m pale, a grayish hue running over me while my hair falls limply around my shoulders. She laughs, and my thin lips fall into a flat line as my eyes darken into colorless voids. I raise my hands in the reflection, letting them motion over my weak and pathetic body before finally speaking again.

“Did you tell her that you liked it?” The words fall from now blueish lips, as if I’m losing more and more oxygen with each passing breath. I’m growing even uglier, and yet I think this is actually how I look all the time.

Nausea rolls through me, and I double over as I heave and vomit threatens my throat.

“Stop,” I snap, forcing the word out of my mouth even though it feels nearly impossible to speak.

“When your brother would touch you, I mean. When he raped you. Did you tell her how badly you enjoyed being out of control like that?” Her voice—my voice—is sick with lethal tones. I collapse on the ground, finally succumbing to vomiting what little wine and bile I have in my stomach. My hand slams against the mirror in front of me, wishing so badly I could break it if it meant ridding myself of this fucking nightmare.

A scream builds inside of my chest, growing and growing as she speaks disgusting, horrifying memories out loud. Things I’ve buried, moments with Rowan I have forced myself to forget because of how painful and terrifying they were. But she doesn’t stop, and I find myself losing control completely when I scream out and open my eyes as I meet hers.

“Stop!” The scream rips free of me, my fist lunging forward and through the glass completely. I pull back as blood coats my hand, and then throw it forward again while my reflection laughs at the destruction. She doesn’t stop talking though, my mind spiraling, unraveling at every word while she poisons my mind. The glass cracks and breaks, shattering in sharp and jagged pieces sliding over my flesh and cutting easily into my arms.

I want to say it all slows, everything calms as my reflection falls into a million pieces at my feet.

But she doesn’t stop. And the pain that consumes my body is something I could have never imagined. I fall to the ground, my fingers scraping over my bloodied hands wrists when I notice the tiny pieces of glass embedded into my skin. “Shit,” I mutter, tears spilling from my eyes and sliding down my face. Panic strikes me, billowing through every limb and rushing over my mind. My eyes can only focus on the blood and glass, growing more and more in every second as it spill easily from my veins and floods the dirt around me.

Even in the midst of my panic, her words are still replaying in my mind, reminders of the horrid decisions I’ve made, the pathetic ways I’ve offered myself to others for tiny shreds of validation and desire.

Oh my god, I’m sick. I’m desperate for attention in ways that ruin myself and those around me. I’ve made everyone hate me, I’ve never been

good enough for anyone to choose me over someone else.

I'm not good. I'm not worthy. I'm lost.

I'm lost.

I'm lost.

I dig my fingertips into the open wounds, deep enough to tightly grip a shard and yank it free of my skin. When I toss it to the ground, I go back for the next, but it doesn't feel like I'm making any progress and far too quickly, I'm covered in my own blood and collapsing onto my back as I continue mangling my own flesh even further.

"Skilla!" I hear the muted sound of my name being called from a distance. The terrifying fear that it's my reflection once again forces my mouth to remain shut aside from my own cries and whimpers of agonizing pain. My heart has slowed considerably, the beat feeling weak in my chest while my skin stains with my own blood and sweat and tears. "Skilla! Where are you?"

I'm dying. And I can't say I'm too upset about that. I deserve this. After everything I've done, every stupid and disgusting mistake I've made—this is what will be best for everyone.

So I keep my mouth sealed tight, refusing to let anyone know where I actually am.

I don't want to be found anymore.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

NA'AMAH

Blood.

Everywhere. Far too much and flowing far too quickly for it to be anything but deadly. Her slowing pulse is another indicator that I'm already too fucking late.

"If you bond her, you can save her," Elijah, a Fallen Angel who has bonded with his Fated reminds me as he races through the forest by my side. I've only spoken with him a few times, and he wasn't supposed to come with me. But I knew I'd need someone to tell me exactly how this works and who can stop me if I go too far in feeding from her.

"Save her? Or kill her?" I ask, anger straining my words like a vice. We're running, and I'm leading us through Lucifer's sick and fucked forest as I follow the scent of her blood.

It's different, right now. The scent I mean. Usually sweet and thick with honey, this is sour and poisoned with something toxic.

Fuck, I let everything get the better of me. My own need to prove to Lucifer she meant nothing, ended up revealing the exact opposite. He knew the moment I pushed to use Brielle in her place, this was different.

Fucking Hell. I hate him.

We move deep into the forest when I finally hear the sounds of Skilla's cries and muffled words. Small whimpers escape her mouth as my entire soul, my body naturally draws toward her sounds. I can feel it, everything inside of me calling to her like a beacon, and it's the first time I wish more than anything that I had given into the idea of bonding her as soon as I realized she was my Fated.

As my eyes scan the thickly forested area, I focus intently on her voice, as painful as it is to hear her like this and trust my own instincts to take me closer and closer to her. I let my feet guide us, trying to ignore the logical ways my mind attempts making sense and determining my path. I know that is not how I'll be able to find her here, in a forest dictated by dark magic and illusion.

I scent her blood, relying wholly on my ability to seek her out through my own addictive hunger and thirst for her. My need to devour her runs rampant as I allow it, knowing its power will help me find her.

We quickly move forward, shifting left and right in the places that take me closer to her. It's only after her cries have become quiet, but close, weak yet nearer that I finally see her small body come into view several feet ahead of me. I rush forward, her name falling from my lips as pleas of hopeful life. I fall to my hands and knees, moving over her pale and lifeless figure as I pull her into my arms.

I immediately feel my own hunger explode through my veins and darken my vision. I can smell her blood and watch as it spills from her arms where clear lashes have injured her flesh. The thirst, the power overwhelms my flesh like vines choking every ounce of strength I have inside of me. My hands begin trembling and Elijah quickly rests his hands on my shoulders as his low voice begins speaking my name.

"Look at me," he bites out hastily, his hard grip forcing my face up to meet his when a savage hiss falls from my fangs. "She will die. This is The Devil's Mirror. It looks like the shards have already embedded themselves into her skin."

Shaking, I focus every bit of my own strength, of my awareness to look down over her body again. I reach for her wrists, and watch as whatever life she still carries has her head turning toward my body and seeking me out. "Skilla," I whisper, pulling her even tighter against me, as I watch her blood turn black when I touch it.

The mixture of her blood with mine, a Fallen, causes it to turn black when connected.

"I'm here, I'm here. Hold on for me and I'll fix this." Tears spring to my eyes as I feel the thin, veiled tether we carry without being bonded pull tightly within me. I can tell she's fading quickly, and my eyes meet Elijah's in desperation when I urge him forward. "Tell me what to do, what to say. I need her, Elijah. I am nothing without her."

His eyes soften in easy understanding before hardening again and moving directly into instruction. He pulls out his own knife from his back pocket, gripping my own wrist and cutting my flesh without a second thought. He moves again, to another portion of my other arm and does the same, the slices barely even registering as pain even while deep enough to quickly draw blood. Adrenaline courses through me, and my hunger for her blood edges any sting I could possibly feel.

He moves quickly, cutting me in several places that rest against her skin and her own wounds while I hold her. “You’ll need to bond her and then feed from her, remove the toxins from the Devil’s mirror that have already poisoned her. Otherwise she will continue living in a prison of the worst parts of herself, cages of misery and rage of not purged from her blood. Do you understand?”

“Yes, of course. I know what the mirror does, I just need her to live before I can drink from her. I won’t take her blood if it will kill her.” I frantically say as I lift her in my arms and press my ear to her open mouth, listening for her breath. It’s subtle, barely there but thankfully present none the less.

“Ol, Na’amah, Throne Angel C Arcadia, allar ol cnila de yours g sibsi. Old arbs de a etharzi c ge congamphlgh ca el.”

I repeat the words and the ritual falls from my cold, parted lips as I shift my own blood over hers. Nothing happens at first, and panic strikes my mind when I worry that we’re already too late.

“Come on, Skillia.” I beg her, dropping my head to hers as I search for her breath once again. The scent of her blood fills me, and I groan out as I bite down hard on my own tongue to force my painful hunger back down. “Do not abandon me now.” Rage bursts under my skin as I helplessly rock back and forth with her in my arms. Elijah continues urging me to repeat the words and they fall from my mouth like prayers as I await any kind of change in her body.

My eyes rake over her form, over the mixture of our blood melding together dully. Nothing changes, and I collapse over her form as tears stain my cheeks and fall into our blood. “Please,” I beg her, words falling limply into the universe, into whatever power can grant me this need.

Because I do, I need her. Her soul, her blood united with mine. Our Fated tether coming to life between us. There is nothing I want more in

this world than to relinquish everything I've built and give it completely to her.

In the next moment, as the Enochian bond continues being spoken over her form, I scent the faintest change in her blood over mine. Unexpectedly, a breath of sweetness hits my lungs, subtly and hardly noticeable, but thankfully evident. My head snaps up and my eyes rake over her body, catching the tiniest place over her wrist where her blood has turned black when mixed with my own.

"There," I gasp, and Elijah leans over to observe as well.

"Keep going," he snaps, shifting Skilla up onto my lap even further as I cling her against me. I speak the words over and over again, until her back slightly arches and I hear the greatest inhale of breath I could have ever imagined hearing. "Do not stop."

Slowly, incredibly, everything begins shifting between us. I can feel it, the thin, faint rope that runs between her soul and mine tugs gently between us. As if it's coming to life, a current of electricity that draws me closer, enchanting my hunger to incomparable proportions. Her fingers suddenly stretch and then lunge for my arms, clinging tightly to me as the bond begins growing stronger in each passing moment.

My eyes race over her injuries, watching as her blood, as mine pool together and move over her flesh. It's in those moments I realize what's happening in her healing process as well, the physical shards of the mirror shifting under skin visibly before purging themselves from her wounds. It's painful, and I literally feel her excruciating sting as if it's in my body as well. Her back arches off from me and a quick explosion of a scream rips free of throat and collides with the air around us.

I hold on to her, tightening my grip as the pain moves roughly through the both of us. I want to surrender completely, but I hold strong, knowing I'll be the one to drag us through this torment until she's healed and I've drank the poison from her blood. My nature will naturally consume it, dissolving it until it's erased entirely. The Vampire's Venom being the only cure to the madness it creates.

"Na'amah," she cries, her voice thick with agony as she clings to me. Her eyes snap open wide, and the terror I feel and see within her destroys me on it's on. My hand immediately reaches for her face, forcing her to look at me as her body convulses and writhes while the glass continues

moving and slashing under her skin. Her nails dig into my flesh, pulling me toward her in the same desperate need I hold as well.

"I'm here," I whisper to her on heavy words, colliding my lips with hers as I press us tightly together. When I pull back, she's screaming again, breathing so heavily that I worry she'll fall unconscious. We ride out the purge together, clinging to our bodies as I fight the hunger and she fights the havoc of poison under her skin.

Slowly, everything begins settling just slightly. As I watch what I believe is the last piece of glass falling from her open wounds. Every slash, every cut begins closing, the redness around her skin changing into a faded olive tone she naturally carries. I can see the scars, but I know over the next few days those will disappear entirely.

Skilla is still trying to catch her breath, her eyes pressed tightly shut as her chest heaves and falls in shallow, rapid, inhales. My hands remain on her body, moving over her skin and feeling her warmth while my own chill spills forth. It melds together, and with her healed injuries, the sudden eruption of our bond overtakes every single aspect of reality we're experiencing.

In one single moment, I feel all of her. Every emotion, every ounce of pain, her exhaustion, her desires. All of it, we're the same heart united in our bodies, blending together in a masterpiece that begs devotion and passion in every part of our souls. Her hands quickly lunge toward my face as I move to hers, her mouth crashing against mine as she kisses me with such ferocity, such power, I want to lose myself entirely within her.

I want under her skin, between her legs, buried in her mind and heart in every possible way imaginable.

"Skilla," I breathe out against her heated moans and whimpers as she sits up and shifts to straddle my lap. I want to kick Elijah out of our fucking space, but I know we aren't finished here yet. "I have to clean your blood of the poison."

Her lips are already moving against my skin, her hands frantically ravaging over my body with the intense need to simply connect in every possible way. "I just need to feel you," she whispers, her hand gripping my neck tightly as she slows her movements and rests her head over my shoulder. She forces steady breaths, that urge of wanting to be even closer running as current in our bond between both of us. "I feel you everywhere

though, at the same time. I want to be closer, and yet you're already living in every part of me."

I wrap my arms tightly around her waist, losing myself to the passion and craving desire flooding our connection and souls. "I know, Kitten. I know. Let me finish this, and we can disappear."

The relief that floods the both of us next is literally tangible, but it's quickly interrupted when a new shock of pain and shame fire in bursts within Skilla right away. She cries out at the pain, caught completely off guard when the remaining poison sends waves through her blood. I immediately move into action, sliding my hand up and around the back of her neck as I tug her close to me.

"What do you have to do?" she asks, her voice so innocent and unknowing, I think she's forgotten what's next.

"Oh, sweet Kitten." I breathe out against her skin as ice lightly frosts her flesh. My fangs move along her throat, feeling for the thick vein running along the side column. "*Now, I Bite you.*"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Skilla

There is not a single chance I'm truly mentally and physically prepared for what's coming. My body is weak, exhaustion claiming every portion of my energy after nearly dying and now binding myself to Na'amah through our Fated bond. It's another world all in its own, the reality of having this unit, this special tether and place that no one else could possibly ever experience with her aside from me.

She's mine.

And I'm hers. In every possible way, and I want to lose myself as we vanish from this place and the people around us. Just for a little while, I want to let go.

But the quick and sporadic rushes of agony, the continued slurs and reminders of my darkest parts are enough to have me wishing for death all over again. So the moment Na'amah mentions biting me, erasing the poison from my blood—I can hardly process it clearly.

My hands are already clinging to her frame, my neck elongated with my head tilted to the side as her lips finally fall over me with a huger that already devours my soul. I can feel it within our bond, the thirst she so starkly craves when around human blood. But even more so when she's with me.

My blood.

My taste.

My body and soul and mind and heart.

Just as it feels as though she was designed specifically for me, I feel as though I was created for her in every way. Down to the fucking minuscule

details.

“Do it,” I whisper over her skin when I feel her hands tighten drastically over my lower back. I vaguely remember someone else being near us, but I believe he moved farther away some point with disappearing completely. “I want you too. I need you too, Na’amah.”

“Begging for my Bite is far more intoxicating than you begging to come, do you realize that?” she releases breathy words, scraping the tips of her fangs along my flesh before pausing and then sucking on me in a seductive kiss.

“I do now,” I moan, rolling my hips against hers as my core wets with my own arousal. The total power and union of our bond has every single one of my senses firing on high alert, my emotions riding an ultimate peak. “I can feel it. Feel how badly you want this.” My voice drops even lower as her soft growl vibrates over my skin. “How much you’d like to fuck me.”

“Fucking Hell,” she whispers, and her hand shifts into the long strands of my hair as she wraps it tightly around her fists and yanks my head harshly to the side. “Do as you’re told, let me feed and purge your blood, and then I’ll make you come again and again and again while I fuck you. I’ll go slow and hard and then devour you myself, tasting your orgasm on your pussy and in your fucking blood.”

I can’t help it, a moan escapes loudly, whimpers and quiet begs as I whisper the words in her ear. Her hands move heavily, tightening and tightening until I’m gasping and clinging to her for my life.

“Don’t pull away from me when you feel it. I’ll know when to stop, I can feel your pulse as if it’s my own. You’ll be able to warn me in slowing down as well if necessary.”

“I’m ready.” My tone takes on a quality of madness, the incredible need I have to feed her in the ways she needs as well as purge the poison from my own body. “I promise.”

It’s when the next wave of pain wracks through me that Na’amah finally pierces my throat, her fangs ripping through my skin in a sudden sting that outweighs every other pain I’ve ever felt in my life.

I whimper, and if it was possible to beg even more, I’m doing it now. I can’t get enough of this, and I can literally feel the poison dragging to my blood as Na’amah claims all of it for herself. Her hands quickly begin sliding over my body, each swallow of her mouth coinciding with another

touch of her hands. In one moment, she's holding my jaw still, drinking long, thick swallows before moving her hand to the front of my chest and slipping over my hard nipples.

God, I want to be alone with her. My pussy is soaked, pulsing and desperate for her to fill and fuck me. I want my own fingers inside of her, feeling how wet she is while she's feeding from me at the same time.

She pulls out of my throat suddenly, and I collapse forward as I gasp for breath. "Don't stop," I beg her, pulling her forward once again and toward my neck. She doesn't even hesitate, and she's immediately sinking her fangs into me once again as she draws from my vein.

"You are the greatest I've ever had, the best I've ever tasted, Kitten." Her words are soft and yet sexual all at the same time. She pulls out and bites me a third time, each one eliciting a new wave of euphoria and elation running through me. "I am nothing without you. My Fated, my other half. I will never regret stealing you away that night, claiming you as mine the second I saw you."

"Everything I've experienced, every hated moment, every mistake, every single right move I've made. It's all led me here, to you. Ready and willing to explore at that life offers with you by my side." I reply, speaking swiftly as I push the words out of my lips between soft moans and needy movements. "You are everything to me, Na'amah."

"Mine," she growls, sucking in deep as I gasp and fall even deeper against her.

"Yours. Always. And you are mine." My own teeth sink into her flesh, not breaking skin but inflicting my own pain and mark of ownership over her skin. She growls a sound that I feel in my chest, in the bond, and our mutual love is easily communicated with no questions.

This, is everything I was ever hoping for.

This story, unique and while chaotic and wild and terrifying. It's mine. Different than anyone else's and filled with a love I could have never imagined in the world of the club, or what I had experienced with anyone before now.

No way. I was simply being prepared, readied for the life altering journey I was about to set forth on with Na'amah. I had to build strength in order to handle what I've been through now.

And I wouldn't change a single moment of it.

EPILOGUE

Skilla

S*he's coming.*

I can feel her everywhere. She's lingering in my blood, growing closer and closer with each passing moment. My skin doesn't heat, no. It ice's over, a deeply seated frost that begins in my bones and quickly spirals out through every other inch of my DNA.

My feet can't move quickly enough, and I'm racing through the narrow, dark hallways as quickly as I can in order to keep my distance from her.

I know what she's bringing, the power and strength she's begging to unleash on me. Ever since we bonded, ever since she fed from me that night all those weeks ago—everything has changed.

It's more intense and far more addictive. She's obsessed with the taste of my blood, claiming every part of me whenever she can just as I am with her. I may not need her blood to survive, to find sustenance, but I need the taste of her flesh against my tongue just as desperately and possessively.

She belongs to me, and in the strangest way everything else has begun to make sense. Every moment I spent longing after Ruby and K, every painful interaction with Rowan, or the countless nights I spent feeling alone and lost.

They built me into the person I was meant to be when I finally found Naamie—or when she found me, truthfully.

After the night in front of the mirror, Na'amah was able to draw every ounce of that toxic poison from my blood stream. It was painful, and

Elijah definitely disappeared once he realized we were safe. When we knew he was gone, we completely lost ourselves to each other.

In every single facet of the word, we surrendered.

She drank my blood and fucked me at the same time. I came against her tongue and then climbed on top of her, licking my own blood off of her lips as I slid inside her cunt and fucked her myself.

Watching her come with blood staining her mouth and slipping over her skin was the sexiest experience I've ever encountered. I came again, watching her as she unraveled on my touch, and after that I basked in the euphoric bliss that rides alongside the sensual sting of the Bite.

Now however, we face very different problematic issues in the Underworld.

It didn't take long for the news of our Fated bond to work its way through the races. Especially after I met with Stella and Luna, many others had ideas of what could be happening once Na'amah appointed Eisheth the responsibility of training the new girls we will eventually add to Lilith's harem.

Questions began circulating, and Lucifer had no intentions of keeping that a secret once he confirmed the bond himself. He stated that he knew the very second Na'amah attempted using Brielle as a distraction over dinner.

"It was a wildly poor attempt only his invalid sister could procure," she told me, her voice laced in mild irritation over his accusation as she mockingly repeated his words. "He's right though, I could have never hidden our bond from him. I can't hide it from anyone." She had laughed though, continuing to remind herself that she could easily kick his ass if it ever came to it.

Brielle has been a non-issue as of late. I think she could drastically feel the difference in Na'amah once we had bonded—though it took a few days of her locking herself away in her bedroom and only allowing Lilith entry—the two of them must have sparked something in their own bond, because they've been inseparable ever since.

Our biggest problem now however, is the fact that Aggie never returned once discovering our Fated bond. She didn't come to the event weeks ago and she never came back even after her sisters finally made contact with her.

She refused and they haven't been able to track her down since. She was running off in the city when they last spoke, after Lucifer allotted a portion of his Demons to search for her. But none of the Queens were able to actually find her, instead, they briefly spoke with her telepathically, through a unique bond they carry as sisters of the Fallen. I believe it has something to do with Eisheth's abilities, but because Aggie is also gifted in divinity, she's been able to place barriers around any location spells Esme has attempted.

And then there was my step-brother, Rowan.

I haven't seen nor heard of him since that last day at my old home. I haven't been back and I don't believe he lived. Na'amah disappeared one night and wouldn't tell me where she was going. It was easily the most painful experience I've had with her—being bonded and being so far apart in two different realms while she took care of whatever business she deemed so important.

I told her never again though. From now on, it will always be the two of us. No secrets. No lies. No questions asked.

She returned just as physically drained and in pain as I was. Her fingers clung to my skin and her teeth sunk into my throat immediately, our bodies entwining and completing each other's souls on every imaginable plane of existence.

So, it's now, that I'm racing through these halls fully aware of how quickly and easily she's swallowing up the distance between us. It's in this moment where my mind is spiraling through every detail of what the last several weeks have looked like to me—that I truly feel the impact of what I've become.

My skin flushes with a blend of both of hot and cold. Heat racing under my skin while her frost sparks through our bond and lingers in my flesh. My core pulses, slick and wet with every step I take while I search for an escape.

My heart thunders in my chest and little strands of my auburn hair have fallen loose of my braid. Now, they cling to my clammy skin and I scrape my fingertips along the cold stone beside me as I quickly round a corner in search of that familiar white, narrow door.

Tap, tap, tap. My bare feet hit the cold ground in light, rapid steps.

But I have to slow down for a moment, leaning forward and wrapping my fingers around my waist while catching my breath. I glance back over

my shoulder, my eyes scanning my dark surroundings for any signs of those electric blue eyes and icy trail.

I move to twist my head around and continue looking for that room when I slam into the towering chest of Na'amah while she stares down at me.

I panic and stumble backwards before falling on my ass and scrambling away. Her eyes are vile bright blue irises of impending danger and pain.

Because this is what I've become in many ways.

The prey.

And she's the hunter, stalking me in every corner of this kingdom. Capturing me and skinning me alive for her food.

"Wait—" I start, but am quickly quieted when her heavy boots take slow, steady strides toward me. I continue rushing back over the ground before I finally turn and crawl to my feet. I run forward, hot breaths spilling from my already exhausted and pained lungs when I dive down the next hallway.

She's growing restless however, my blood boiling in my veins in response to the heady lust filled hunger she's clearly emanating through our bond. She's starving, in more ways than one.

The anticipation works two-fold inside of my mind—frightened with the looming pain I know she brings and intoxicated with the craving need I have to feel it.

To feel everything.

Pleasure.

Pain.

Bliss.

Humiliation.

Euphoria.

I want her to degrade me and fuck me, bite me and whisper how badly she needs me. I want to come as she forces me to beg and then I want to hear her moan as I give it back just as roughly.

My feet race forward and I'm just about to run around the next corner when I'm suddenly yanked back so harshly, I cry out as a violent pain rips against the back of my head. Thrown on my ass again, I realize Na'amah has her fist wrapped in the braid of my hair. She's dragging me backwards

over the stone ground, my feet scrambling below as my hands frantically attempt gripping her hold and pulling it away.

But I can't break free, and Na'amah's silence holds steady and thick between us in erotic waves of tension and power.

"Naamie," I breathe out between hushed whimpers. "I'll follow you, I promise."

No response.

"Please," I beg just before gasping when she snaps my head back by the rope of my braid. She pauses our movements and wraps her other hand around the front of my throat. Gripping me tightly, she forces my head back before she finally speaks.

"Always so fucking bad," she grinds out, her thumb slipping along my lower lip and tugging it down. She moves lower, until she's pinching my chin and forcing my mouth open while she hovers above me. "My slut would never call me Naamie, would she?" Her eyes bore into my own, swimming with toxicity and possession.

I try to speak, but it's difficult, and she doesn't release her rough hold in the slightest to ease my struggle. "No," I manage to say.

"Are you going to be a good whore for me tonight?" She asks, her head tilting to the left as she moves even closer. I can feel the ice of breath falling over my skin, and the pull of our Fated connection lighting on fire in my blood.

"Yes," I reply, slipping into the sexy, powerful place of submission I hold here. I fucking love this, and I'll be her slut every day of the week if it means letting her own me like this.

"Then what do you call me?"

"Alca," I speak the word easily and knowingly, letting her knock me down into this place of filth and degradation.

Her lips pick up in the tiniest, arrogant smirk before she snaps my head back even farther against her chest. Her white blonde hair falls over the side of her face, and God, my fingers ache to fucking run those strands between my fingertips.

Suddenly, her own lips fall open and she speaks again. Her voice is low and carrying an edge of sadistic eroticism I've both fallen in love and learned to fear. "Show me that filthy tongue of yours, Kitten."

I do as she says, breathing out quickly as I push my tongue out of my mouth for her. My eyes remain trained on her open mouth, and I watch

intently, nervously, as a slick strand of saliva falls from rosy lips.

I feel fucking dirty, and yet my mouth opens even wider, my tongue falling even farther as I let it hit my skin before she shoves my mouth shut and forces me to taste her. I'm still for a moment, processing what she's done when her palm smacks the edge of my jaw and a new pain shoots across my skin.

"Swallow, you fucking whore." Her voice is intoxicating, and her fangs have descended completely when her eyes watch my throat while I do as she says. "Fuck. I need to taste you."

She immediately moves into action, dragging me farther down the hall a few feet before her foot launches back and she kicks open that white door I was so desperate to find earlier.

It's dark in here, glowing only with small accents of Na'amah's blue and sparkle of ice in her decor. Once she's shut the door behind us, she pulls me up with a hard, cold touch and forces me back several steps until I'm standing in the middle of her room.

She twists me around at the last moment, and I'm completely caught off guard when I feel the sharp, pointed blade of a knife against the side of my throat. My hand immediately snaps up and grips her wrist tightly, attempting to pull it away from my skin even only an inch if possible.

"What are you doing?" I ask, my voice quiet and trembling with a fear I hadn't expected to feel in regard to her. But I dive deep, searching our bond for anything that could give any indication of what I should expect.

"Do you trust me?" She asks, her tone taking a softer quality while still maintaining her familiar authority.

Pausing, I force a deep steady breath and focus on the feeling of that blade over my skin. My pussy is wet, and my thighs shift together only slightly while I feel the air of her coldness brush between my legs. It's her energy, also moving around me so thickly, eliciting actual physical responses whenever I'm with her.

"Yes," I finally reply, bravely leaning into the blade incrementally until I gasp at the subtle sting over my skin. She groans into my ear and the sound rumbles in her chest as she pulls me even harder against her. I feel it in my own body, her stark and distinct need for blood. Her other hand slides down the front of my stomach until she's teasing the edge of my jeans and unbuttoning them.

“Tell me what you want, Kitten,” she demands, her fingers moving even lower as her lips begin gliding over the open side of my neck. She trails the tip over the blade down my slender column, moving so slowly I can almost feel the way it digs a bit deeper with every inch lower.

What do I want? I genuinely wonder, because so many desires are welling up inside of me at the same time. My hands drift over hers as she finally moves between my thighs, running over my core and slicking her fingers with my cum. I moan out at the immediate touch, my legs spreading slightly so she can run through a second time.

“I want you to fuck me,” I tell her, tilting my head back so she can continue gliding the blade over my skin. “I want to feed you.” I fall back against her, my legs going weak as she begins circling my clit. “Fuck, I want to bleed for you.”

A quiet, possessive groan escapes her own lips. In the next moment, her fingers are diving deep, pushing inside of me quickly and almost painfully as I have to quickly stretch around her. I gasp, falling forward over the edge of her bed when she hastily pulls me against her hips. She slides inside of me and then back out in only a few shallow pumps. I’m desperate for more, and nearing another muffled cry of pleads when she pulls out of me and promptly shoves my jeans to the ground around my ankles.

My ass is completely exposed for her, my pussy cold and slick in the air in front of her hips. She leans forward and yanks my top over my head so that I’m naked and bare at her mercy. I suddenly hear the sound of her unzipping her own jeans and pulling off her clothes, so I move to stand up in hopes that I can turn around and touch her myself.

But she’s far quicker and the second I shift upwards, her long fingers are roughly gripping the back of my neck and shoving my face against the sheets of her bed. “Stay the fuck down,” she bites out and I instantly do as she says while forcing myself still through consistent steady breaths.

“Please,” I whimper, my ass unintentionally swaying with need once I feel her naked, cold frame step up against me. “Please fuck me.”

She doesn’t answer, but instead I hear her fall to her knees behind me and it’s in the next moment I feel her long, lithe fingers slip up the backs of my thighs before spreading my legs even wider apart. “Do not move, do not pull away. Understand?” Her words leave absolutely no room for

discussion, and I nod my head quickly as I wait for her to hopefully fill me. “Do not come, Kitten. Not until I tell you to.”

Her thumbs move over my cunt, spreading me apart as her lips slowly inch up my inner thigh and her tongue runs over my heated flesh. I push back, just slightly but she immediately shoves me forward again, her rough hold being the only reminder that I’m to stay completely still.

She returns her attention to my pussy, her mouth moving over my core until I feel her fucking breath blowing cold of my wetness. “Oh fuck,” I stutter, the words frantic and needy as they fall from me freely. “Please, fuck me and make me yours, Alca.”

“You like being mine, don’t you?” She whispers, her tone vain and sexual at the same time.

“Yes,” I tell her, fully losing myself to the tension and energy spilling through us. I can feel everything in my blood and my soul, my mind consumed with images of what we can do together.

“You look so good for me like this, Kitten. Your pussy exposed for me, open and wet and ready for me to taste you.” Instantly, her tongue slides through my open core, the tip circling my clit before sliding back up to my opening and pushing inside me. I moan out uncontrollably, practically coming at the first touch of her tongue against my fucking flesh.

She feels so fucking good, and I’m lost to the way she fucks me immediately.

She pushes deeper against my cunt, her mouth devouring me gently at first, but growing quick and hungry and desperate almost right away. Her fingers clamp down around my thighs, yanking me wider apart as before slipping two fingers inside of me and fucking me from behind.

“Holy fuck,” I cry out, moans and whimpers escaping so rapidly that I worry others may hear us in the kingdom. “Na’amah,” I breathe, already feeling an orgasm begin whipping inside of me. “Please, I’m going to come already.”

She snaps up, pulling away and dropping over my back when I suddenly feel her fingers wrap around my throat as she flips me onto my back. She holds me down, straddling my waist as she leans down and her lips collide with mine in a war of possession. She’s owning me, in every touch and sound she pulls from my wrecked and needy body. And I own her in the same ways, drawing these connections, these demands and touches as though they already belong to me.

Before I know what's happening, she's dropping between my legs once again. Her fangs now drag over my skin, moving lower and lower until she's scraping them along my inner thigh and holding my leg in front of her. I lean up on my elbows, watching intensely with a frightening anticipation of what she could be about to do.

She's never fed from me in any place aside from my neck or wrist. But it's when her eyes meet mine, drenching my soul with her thirst and need for blood that I know it's coming.

Instantly, she pulls back, dark veins spiraling out under her eyes when they darken and become consumed with her own desire. She lunges forward, her fangs sinking into my inner thigh, just below my pussy that I launch upwards, gasping as the sting rips through my blood and ripples through my entire body.

I cry out, just before the wave of euphoric bliss lashes through the pain and envelopes me in everything that is her instead. I fall against her bed again, sensing the draws of her feeding from my vein with every heated swallow. My back arches off the mattress, my fingers falling to tangle in the loose strands of her hair as everything shifts around me.

The energy thickens, the air turns light, my blood lights on fire and ices over at the same time. The bond between us surges, thriving in this moment harder than it ever has. It ties us together as both the prey and predator. It's the union of two complete opposites, creating a harmonic fusion that's unmatched to anything I could ever imagine possible.

She pulls out of my flesh for a moment, her wild eyes meeting mine as crimson blood stains her sweet lips. "You're mine," she states firmly, confidently. "Only mine. Say it."

"Yours," I tell her and she rewards me by sinking her fangs into me once more, this time even closer to my pussy and her free hand slips inside of me at the same time.

I can't even take the oceanic waves of orgasm building inside of me. It's too much, a hurricane of explosions that begin cresting too rapidly for me to stop them. But I try, God, I fucking try to. Using every ounce of my own strength to hold them back as I look to her and watch as she fucks me deep and rough while she eats.

"Let them go," she urges, pausing between swallows to finally give me permission. "Come for me, Skilla. Let me taste all the ways I own you."

The second her agreeance is spoken into the air, my body and blood respond accordingly. One orgasm immediately rips through me, a catastrophic detonation that travels from my pussy and out through every inch of my body. She doesn't stop pumping inside of me though, doesn't cut off that blissful pleasure her Bite gifts me, and a second and third orgasm are quick to follow through right away.

I'm practically screaming, any semblance of potential quiet being taken from me uncontrollably. I can't help it, my lips part and words I can't even decipher spill forth with every cry and whimper and beg I release.

She lets me ride every orgasm out on her touch, filling herself and coming by the simple taste of my blood as I break because of her.

In the moments that follow, she shifts over me and pulls me into her arms. The energy shifts between us from this kinky, probably toxic twist of our sexual encounters into an array of passion and love and connection.

We constantly ride this balance. Drifting between waves of demonic natural instincts, surrendering to dark and bloody desires before countering it with love and light and union.

When I think back over what we've become together, over the life we've created in such a short amount of time—I realize I accomplished exactly what I meant to that night I dared enter the Kink Club of Pandora's Box.

I wrote my own story. Created my own identity. And in the same breath, met the one soul destined to unite with my own.

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT I'D DISCOVER A WORLD FILLED WITH DEMONS, Fallen Angels and Harems.

And that my Fated connection would be destined to the soul of a Vampire.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I feel like I'm saying hello to all of you again for the first time, in a strange way. It's been seven months since my last release and that number grew so quickly, I didn't catch it passing me by.

Skilla's story was one I never anticipated writing, if I'm being completely honest. She was never supposed to have a larger voice than the one she had in Vibe and Hush. But I had so many readers reach out in regards to her character, to her own story, that I knew it had to be bigger than what I had originally seen.

Cue Na'amah and the Four Queens.

Now, that idea had been one I've marinated on since I first wrote Fated. Skilla was honestly too large for the contemporary side of Pandora's Box anyway. She had already surpassed those relationships, outgrown the boxes of what normality had placed around her.

She was a trouble maker, seeking validation and connection through chaos and toxicity.

She needed Na'amah. And Na'amah needed her to truly humanize her nature once again.

It's funny, ending a book and feeling proud of your characters. Because in your head, they're real people with real problems and genuine trauma and beautiful connections.

So, my first thank you goes to them, for showing me how valid the journey is in writing your own story. For proving that strength is discovered from within, and transformation can take on thousands of different outcomes. But for also showing me that ultimately, surrendering to your own beauty—in all shapes and forms—is never the wrong decision. Acceptance and self-love will set you free and allow you to become exactly who you are meant to be.

My next thank you goes to my readers. Without you all, writing these stories would be nothing more than scribbled and strewn notebook papers lost to the abyss of my disorganized mind. While everything I write comes

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